

**When Christians Fight: Ecumenical Theologies And The
Troubles In Northern Ireland**

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October 2009

ABSTRACT

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In this thesis I first of all outline the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Against the prevalent academic consensus that the conflict is an ethnic one, I argue that it is a religious conflict with features of ethnicity and colonialism. I then assess the behaviour of the state, both under the Unionist government at Stormont and then under Direct Rule from Westminster. Pre-1972 I look at the question of discrimination against the Roman Catholic minority community. I argue that this was 'institutionalised partiality'. In the era of the 'Troubles' I provide continuity by seeing through the issue of 'fair employment' and also focus on the British Government's response to the violence in terms of abuses of human rights. My view is that political theology in Northern Ireland has never engaged critically with all the material presented in these chapters.

After establishing that religion is the central motif of the 'Troubles', whose political manifestation is the parameters and behaviour of a particular state, I examine the broad sweep of the role the Churches played as they responded to the outbreak of inter-communal violence in 1968. I concentrate on the missed opportunity of the Violence Report of 1974 and what I term the 'ecumenical paradox' of the Churches reaction to the 'Troubles'. I then examine three representative theological reflections on the situation. One advocates a theological response to the 'Troubles' of reconciliation, one of citizenship and one of justice. After examining the evidence I offer a theology of justice, or liberation, which needed to be added to the dominant theological paradigm of reconciliation to provide a cogent response to the 'Troubles'. I give the example of the role of prisoners as a model from which the Churches could learn from.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Keith Whitelam, the University of Sheffield Department of Biblical Studies, for all the help and guidance he has provided. I also want to thank the Rev Dr John Vincent, the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield, for the inspiration his spoken and written words have provided over the years, that both directly and indirectly have led to this thesis.

I want to dedicate this thesis to my wife Jayne, without whose constant encouragement this would not have been possible, and to my children Will and Molly. Finally, I write this in memory of my late father William Noel Irwin who taught me about Christianity, peace, justice, socialism and most importantly how they all belong together.

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INTRODUCTION

One of my earliest memories was the armoured car that appeared at the end of our street in east Belfast when the 'Troubles' began. My friends and I spent happy times getting rides and playing with the guns of the soldiers. Although very young we were aware that there was a much more serious side to the fun we were having; a next door neighbour was an RUC man who was away in Derry/Londonderry putting down 'the rebels'. I grew up, as many Ulster Protestants did, with life focussed around the Church and the Orange Order. Though my father was a member of both the 'Orange' and the 'Black', he was also a strong socialist and trade unionist, while both my grandfathers were members of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. Indeed my paternal grandfather had gotten into some trouble when he objected to an English Tory gentleman being parachuted in by the Unionist Party to represent our working class constituency. Looking back, I see that this 'Protestant Labour' tradition was where I gained an overriding sense of the importance of justice. It also led to some very heated debates in later life as I failed to see why my father's principles of both socialism and justice should not be applied to the injustices suffered by the Roman Catholic community in Northern Ireland.

From three years of age my best friend was a Roman Catholic. Frank and his family were, as far as I was aware, the only Roman Catholic family in our area. That they remained, even through the darkest days of the 'Troubles', when others all over Northern Ireland were being intimidated out of their homes and forced to go and live with those on their own side, is testimony to the esteem that they were held in by our community. At thirteen years of age I ended up playing for a Roman Catholic football team, because Frank, who played for them, invited me along to have a kick around with the team. I had not encountered too many other Roman Catholics and I loved football so I joined in. Even though I was friendly with Frank, I was still a member of the junior Orange Order and wore a UVF badge with "For God and Ulster" emblazoned on it and was thinking a lot about how great it would be to fight and die for Ulster. Yet for some reason that I still to this day cannot fathom, I signed and played for the team for over two years.

The team, St. John Vianney, was based on the Lower Ormeau Road, which is a fiercely Republican enclave in south Belfast, that has suffered huge amounts of violence during the 'Troubles'. The Ormeau bridge across the river Lagan was the physical barrier that divided the two communities. My father would not drive across the bridge in order for me to meet and play, while the team minibus would not come into our Protestant area. The compromise was that I would be dropped off at the convent on the Ormeau Road (which happened to be in the Protestant part of the road) and then I was picked up by the team manager in his car. It worked beautifully as the Protestant was happy to leave me in a Protestant area, albeit at a Roman Catholic convent, while the Roman Catholic did not mind coming into a Protestant area as he was coming to a Roman Catholic institution! At one level this rightly seems ridiculous. However one needs to remember that in those days (the mid-to late-seventies) to be spotted and identified in a community that was not your own could lead to torture and death.

So, I was the only Protestant in the team; in fact I was the only Protestant in the league. I remember hearing a conversation at a pre-season tournament when a team mate of mine (who had recently had a close relative murdered by loyalist paramilitaries) was asked whether we were a Protestant or Roman Catholic team? His answer, which made me very proud, was that "We are a mixed team". At the same tournament, this was also the first time I was called "a fenian bastard". I replied that I was not a fenian and the response was that I was "a fenian loving bastard". We played all our matches in Roman Catholic areas in Belfast and I visited places that I only ever heard about on the news, like Anderstown, New Lodge and the Falls Road. One of our matches on the Falls Road was canceled as there was a body on the pitch, a poor unfortunate executed by the IRA as an informer.

These were my first ecumenical experiences. When we won the league I met a Roman Catholic Bishop for the first time and got splashed by holy water. We went on a day trip on a Sunday to celebrate our success and when all the rest of the team were taken into mass I climbed up on the roof of the minibus and looked through the window at the service. I am not sure what I expected to witness, but it was certainly very different from what I had been led to think from the Protestant Churches and the Orange Order. This was also the first time in my life that I ever played football on a

Sunday which caused great consternation in my family and led to my parting of the ways with the Orange Order.

If I learned a lot ecumenically, I learned even more politically. It was my first exposure to the poverty and deprivation of a Roman Catholic working class community. I was from a working class background myself and my father had recently lost his job; but this was a step down in terms of conditions and expectations. I also began to see how my friends in the team were treated by the state, particularly as represented by the Security Forces.¹ Stories of harassment and beatings were commonplace and two members of the team were shot dead. One was killed by the Security Forces in hotly disputed circumstances. He was carrying a paint brush, which the Security Forces said was a gun. He was shot in the back. No one was convicted for his killing. Another was killed by Loyalists. Several team mates later served time as Republican prisoners.

At sixteen I was told quietly, from both sides, that it was time not to play for the team anymore. No reason was given; it was the time of the hunger strikes when community relations were worse than ever, and the hint was that somehow you are more likely to be considered a legitimate target at sixteen and it would no longer be safe.

I then volunteered to work with the Quakers at Quaker cottage in west Belfast. The Quakers are a very small community in Northern Ireland, but they seemed to do much more peace and justice work than the much larger Churches. They particularly specialised in work with prisoners and within the inner city. Quaker cottage is half way up the black mountain in Belfast and while it is only half a mile or so away from what were some of the most deprived communities in Europe, it seems like a world away looking down. I worked with children from both communities, coming across prisoners families for the first time and spent a lot of time in Moyard and Ballymurphy which were almost bywords for poverty and violence. I was visiting a flat in Moyard, it was a typical spotless Ulster home, but the damp was running down the walls and the paper was falling off even though it was new. The children were ill because of the conditions they were living in. I had never seen anything in my life

¹ 'Security Forces' is an inclusive term which covers the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the British Army and the Ulster Defence Regiment (later replaced by the Royal Irish Regiment).

like it. This was not because Roman Catholics were feckless or lazy, which was the commonplace view in my community. This, I decided, was due to injustice and nothing else.

At the same time I was continuing my education. I signed up for an History A Level which specialised in Irish history. I learned for the first time Irish history from the famous Battle of the Boyne (being greatly surprised to find out that King William of Orange was supported by the Pope) through the 1798 rebellion up to the beginning of the 'Troubles'. I also began a Religious Education A Level. Somehow the teacher, a Church of Ireland clergyman, had managed to put together a course which consisted of form and redaction criticism using Mark's Gospel, the quest for the historical Jesus, the history of Christian socialism, the ecumenical movement and political theology (Bonhoeffer, Moltmann, Metz and Gutierrez).

During my time volunteering with the Quakers I came to believe that ecumenism was the best hope for Northern Ireland. I began to visit the ecumenical communities of Corrymeela, Cornerstone and Columbanus and threw myself into the peace and reconciliation work associated with them. It seemed natural to me that I should connect the experiences I was having in west and south Belfast with what I was learning about political and liberation theology. But in any of the theological reflections I read on Northern Ireland, or conversations I had, they were deemed either irrelevant or even dangerous. I did not expect too much from the Protestant Churches but I did invest a lot of hope in the ecumenical groups and movement. I was happy enough with their emphasis on reconciliation and peace, but what about justice, human rights, oppression and discrimination? Do they, should they, not all go together?

This thesis is quite simply the result of an itch I have had for more than twenty years. The scratching of the itch is trying to answer the questions that my praxis and my reflection threw up in the midst of the conflict that were not answered. What is the problem in Northern Ireland? Were Roman Catholics really discriminated against? If so, how much? Where did that discrimination come from? What caused the violence? Were the 'Troubles' just due to the behaviour of a few bad people? What about the experiences of violence from the state? What are the options for Christians and

Churches in this situation? What should the raw material be for theological reflection in such a situation of conflict? Did I miss a theological response that would have answered all, or even most of, my questions?

The methodology of my thesis is first of all to provide a canvas on which a political theology of the 'Troubles' must be painted. I do this by examining what the conflict in Northern Ireland is about. I then consider the questions of justice that have arisen from the formation of the Northern state through to and beyond the abolition of Stormont, when Direct Rule from Westminster was imposed on Northern Ireland. I look at three representative examples of a theological response to the 'Troubles' from groups which all, in different ways, transcended denominational boundaries. I do this because I want to examine what are considered by many, including me, to be the best responses of theology to the 'Troubles' by encouraging communities and people to come together for peace, justice and reconciliation. I then focus on a group in Northern Ireland that has fascinated me since my days working with the Quakers; that is, the role played by the paramilitary prisoners in the ongoing peace process. I suggest that they perhaps provide a better model of Christian peacemaking and reconciliation than that given by the Christian Churches both singly and together.

In terms of the content of my work, it is possible to find a more detailed exposition of any part of what I write about. What I believe is different, and why I wanted to write this and to write this in this particular way, is that the different elements of this work have never been put together and interlinked before. I contend that political theology in and on Northern Ireland has largely operated with huge unspoken assumptions about the nature and behaviour of the state in Northern Ireland, untested by any political reality. This testing, quite simply, is what I propose to do.

CHAPTER ONE

A PROBLEM FOR EVERY SOLUTION - RELIGION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 There is a saying that Northern Ireland is a place where there is a 'problem for every solution'. Yet, the contested nature of the solutions on offer is reflected when one seeks an explanation as to why the conflict exists at all. On one level it is not surprising that there is a wide diversity of opinion trying to come to terms with what has been going on in Northern Ireland. When you have a community conflict it can be addressed from a variety of perspectives. One can find conceptual frameworks for understanding the 'Troubles' based on history, theology, sociology, social anthropology, political science, psychology, social psychology and economics. John Darby in 1986 noted that in terms of the relationships between the communities in Northern Ireland, the focus will be different according to the discipline. Explanations can, of course, also combine two or more of these disciplines while, within each discipline, various schools of thought may provide differing explanations of the same data.

1.1.2 Darby says that those who write community studies and who tend to be anthropologists will emphasise that the conflict has very little influence on everyday life. While political scientists and historians looking at the same situations will stress the amount of violence and dysfunction that exists, I would argue that most people who live in Northern Ireland will tell you that both perspectives are entirely correct.¹ After visiting Belfast and expecting Beirut, the English poet and songwriter Billy

¹ J. Darby, *Intimidation and the Control of Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), pp. 5-7. Cited by J. Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p.15.

Bragg was surprised to find what he called simply ‘a northern industrial town.’² A Church group from Dublin on a visit to Belfast in 1988, made a number of comments on how ‘normal’ life was on this particular Saturday morning with folk going about their business or doing their shopping. Slightly later in the day some of the visitors were traumatised when they were caught up in a gun and rocket attack on a central Belfast police station while shopping. Someone coming from outside Northern Ireland who only reads a certain study, or indeed reads within a particular discipline, may well get a distorted picture of the conflict.

1.1.3 Writing in 1990, John Whyte commented that, ‘It is quite possible that, in proportion to size, Northern Ireland is the most heavily researched area on earth’.³ Whyte analyses around 500 different explanations of the conflict. In fact, a number of works exist simply in order to survey the wide range of explanations on offer.⁴ Whyte argues that there are four basic interpretations of the Northern Irish problem:

1. traditional nationalist
2. traditional unionist
3. Marxist
4. two-community, or internal conflict

He comes to this particular conclusion by examining who authors see as the main protagonists within the conflict.

1. Britain v. Ireland
2. Southern Ireland v. Northern Ireland

² ‘But it’s not Leeds or Manchester
Liverpool, Sheffield or Glasgow
It’s not Newcastle –on Tyne, It’s Belfast
It’s just a northern industrial town’

Billy Bragg ‘Northern Industrial Town’ from the album *William Blake* (BMG Music, 1996).

³Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.viii. It is perhaps possible that Israel/Palestine would give Northern Ireland a run for its money. Though if you Google ‘Academic articles on Northern Ireland’ you get around 2,530,000 hits, while ‘Academic articles on Israel/Palestine’ yields 834,000 hits. (Accessed: 23 August 2009)

⁴See for example: A. Lijphart, ‘The Northern Ireland Problem: Cases, Theories and Solutions’, *British Journal of Political Science* 5 (1975) pp.83-106; J. Martin, ‘The Conflict in Northern Ireland: Marxist interpretations’, *Capital and Class* 18 (1982) pp.56-71; Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* and J.McGarry and B.O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

3. Capitalist v. Worker

4. Protestant v. Catholic within Northern Ireland ⁵

1.1.4 The schema of this work is to organise the various explanations for the conflict under the headings of 'religion', 'ethnicity' and 'colonialism'. This is a theological thesis and so it begins with religion in order to be clear about the role of theology in the problem before there can be movement towards finding how theology fits into a solution. After that, there is a look at the characterisation of the situation as an ethnic conflict. After this, an examination is done to see what role, if any, colonialism plays and/or played in the situation. This threefold schema provides the best way of comparing political theologies of the conflict. As this picture is painted there will be a sense of the historical movement within and between the explanations offered. After examining these positions, a comprehensive interpretation of the conflict will be offered.

1.1.5 It is important that explanations for the 'Troubles' that they are not seen *per se* to be mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is at the interface of the various models given of the conflict that theology needs to be done. It has been the failure to do this and so to see all truth in one picture that has led to deficient theology which fails to reflect all the important aspects of the conflict. Whyte believes that Northern Ireland provides us with an excellent case study of how human beings cannot hold in their minds all at once the full complexity of a situation. They then create models which simplify and point to what they think is the dominant element in a situation. This is fine so long as our work takes into consideration elements which, while we may not consider them to be dominant, are nonetheless important. The great failure in theological reflection upon the 'Troubles' is the inability to do this.⁶

1.2 Religion

1.2.1 If the question was put for a characterisation of the division within Northern Ireland from anyone with even a passing knowledge of the situation, the response would

⁵Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.114.

⁶Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.114

surely be that it is a conflict, in some sense, between ‘Protestants’ and ‘Roman Catholics’. Yet, Paul Badham points out that, ‘One of the most widely believed axioms of contemporary politics is that the conflict in Northern Ireland is not really a dispute about religion’.⁷ While it is true that religious labels are ostensibly used, they are seen as flags of convenience for cultural, social and/or ethnic differences of what is really important. John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary argue in their chapter on religious interpretations of the conflict that once explanations which emphasise the primary role of religion are closely examined ‘they evaporate, leaving little residue’.⁸ Pamela Clayton posits the view that sociologists who see the religious divide as the cause of the conflict are very much in a minority.⁹ Darby broadens this perspective out from sociology by stating that only a small number of commentators across the full spectrum of academic disciplines take the view that religion is the core element in the conflict.¹⁰ While Whyte concludes a section of writing on ‘The Churches’ by stating that, ‘If the Churches as such were the main source of division, one might expect to find, not two, but many more than two communities in Northern Ireland’.¹¹ For him, there is a sense of randomness about the religious divide in Northern Ireland. If we make a comparison with societies that are similarly divided in religious terms, like Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium then he believes we will see that the causal factors for the Northern Irish conflict must be sought elsewhere.¹²

1.2.2 Clayton states, ‘the religious analysis suffers from the handicap that the inferior social, economic and political state of the members of one sect, Catholics, is not obvious from the term’.¹³ This criticism by Clayton that *a priori* we cannot use the religious analysis because it does not contain what for her is the important aspect of the

⁷Paul Badham, ‘The Contribution of Religion to the Conflict in Northern Ireland’, in *The Canterbury Papers Essays on Religion and Society* (ed. D.Cohn-Sherbok; London: Bellem Pat, 1990), p.119.

⁸McGarry and O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images*, p.213.

⁹Pamela Clayton, ‘Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland conflict’, in *Rethinking Northern Ireland* (ed. D. Miller; Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998), p.40.

¹⁰J. Darby, *Scorpions in a Bottle: Conflicting Cultures in Northern Ireland* (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1997), p.53.

¹¹ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.30.

¹² Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.72.

¹³ Pamela Clayton, ‘Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict’, p.41.

conflict, i.e. the oppression of the Roman Catholic population, does seem rather strange. It is surely correct to categorise the struggle against apartheid in South Africa as being, in some sense at least, a racial struggle? Yet, within the categorisation of it as a racial struggle there is nothing inherent which speaks of the inferior condition of the black populace. It is only when we give content to the definition theoretically and empirically that this oppression comes into view. There could also conceivably be a racial struggle between two equal groups where no oppression or discrimination took place but there was, for example, a territorial dispute. She surely makes this point to highlight her own preference for a colonial analysis of the Northern Irish situation which of course does contain, *a priori*, an understanding of an unequal relationship between coloniser and colonised. However, her attempt to dismiss any religious analysis of the Northern Irish situation *per se* fails.

- 1.2.3 We can contrast these views with those of Lambkin, who actually sees a consensus emerging which will give a central place to religion in interpreting the conflict.¹⁴ Badham states that in terms both of history and the self-perception of contemporary protagonists, ‘religion has been and is central to the development of the whole conflict’.¹⁵ The Opsahl Commission which conducted a ‘citizens’ inquiry into the ‘Troubles’ concluded that religion was a ‘potent component’ of the conflict.¹⁶ Clayton cites Steve Bruce as the sociologist who is best known for putting forward the idea that the conflict in Northern Ireland is a religious one. She highlights his claim at a debate in Queen’s University Belfast in 1987 that, ‘The religious division is the cause of the conflict’. She says he went on to point out the essential oppositional nature of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism arguing that if the settlers and natives had shared one religion then marriage would have in time eroded ethnic boundaries.¹⁷

¹⁴ B. Lambkin, *Opposite Religions Still? Interpreting Northern Ireland After the Conflict* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996), p.3.

¹⁵ Badham, ‘The Contribution of Religion to the Conflict in Northern Ireland’, p.119.

¹⁶ A. Pollak, ed., *A Citizens’ Inquiry: The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), p.101.

¹⁷ Pamela Clayton, ‘Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict’, p.41.

As he begins to cite his conclusions in *God Save Ulster! The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism*, Bruce says that ‘the Northern Ireland conflict is a religious conflict’.¹⁸

- 1.2.4 Clayton’s view of the role of religion in conflict helps us get to the heart of the matter in trying to make some sense of the juxtaposed positions we find above. ‘The use of religion for political purposes does not, however make it a religious conflict in the sense of a conflict caused by religion or informed by purely religious values. It is open to question whether there has ever been such a conflict’.¹⁹ For her, power struggles involving religion must always be seen in terms of ethnicity, wealth, status, gender, social, political or factional. As she says, ‘anything but doctrinal’.²⁰
- 1.2.5 The idea that you can fight about anything except religion flies in the face of history and experience. It also gives religion a unique place in human history as the one thing that does not cause conflict. It would seem unusual that Clayton would want to give religion this special status. Of course, this is not to deny that religious conflicts have other elements and causes. Nonetheless, this treating of politics and religion as inevitably discrete spheres distorts reality and analysis by confusing the totality of religion with doctrine. However, Clayton provides an important service by giving us an insight into one of the problems in the discussion of the role of religion in the Northern Irish conflict; namely, the equation of religion with religious doctrine. Much of the dispute, between those who posit the importance of religion in the conflict and those who deny its centrality, disappears when one inquires as to what definition of religion they are actually using. When analysts of Northern Ireland announce that the conflict is not really religious, they often mean that it is not a dispute about doctrine. This is seen in the argument, cited by Whyte above, that if the conflict was about religion then there would be more than two protagonists because of the disagreements, not just between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, but also

¹⁸ S. Bruce, *God Save Ulster! The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.249. He does qualify this statement straight away by saying economic and social differences should also be seen as crucial.

¹⁹ Pamela Clayton, ‘Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict’, p.44.

²⁰ Pamela Clayton, ‘Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict’, p.44.

say between Arminians and Calvinists over predestination, or between Presbyterians and Anglicans over patterns of Church government.

1.2.6 On the other side of the argument those who argue for the importance of religion can be seen to be operating with a wider definition of religion and its influence. In a publication from 1986, Bruce (along with Taylor and Wallis) is clear that he follows Durkheim in the view that religion in society operates as a sign pointing to something else and providing the function of the maintenance of social solidarity.²¹ Brewer and Higgins, using the analysis of Pecheux and Foucault, speak of how ideologies become expressed in terms of ‘discursive formations’. They argue that for Protestantism, anti-Catholicism provides a ‘discursive formation’ which provides a reflection in linguistic form of patterns of dominance and power.²² As they say:

Alternative discourses - based for example, around social class, race or gender - are not discursive formations with any influence because they do not reflect structural conditions and lines of differentiation in Northern Ireland and thus cannot capture what needs to be said, what can be said, or how it can be said, because they speak about the wrong things.²³

Pointing out that when Protestants speak about Roman Catholics it is speech about identity as much as doctrine, it is also clear from their preceding argument that the relationship between the two is symbiotic. On the Roman Catholic side, Marianne Elliott states that, ‘For Catholics their religion *was* their political identity, and the church provided all the necessary institutional infrastructure’.²⁴ This relationship between religion and politics in Northern Ireland is stressed by Terence McCaughey

²¹ R. Wallis, S. Bruce and D. Taylor, *‘No Surrender’: Paisleyism and the Politics of Ethnic Identity in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Department of Social Studies, Queen’s University, 1986).

²² J. D. Brewer with G. I. Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland. 1600-1998 The Mote and the Beam* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998) pp.182-185.

²³ Brewer with Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland. 1600-1998 The Mote and the Beam*, p.184.

²⁴ M. Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster A History* (London: Penguin, 2000) p.450. She goes on to state: ‘That is why secular nationalist institutions, including the Nationalist Party itself, remained so weak in Northern Ireland. There was no need for them’.

when he says that 'Politics has functioned as a surrogate religion and, more frequently perhaps, religion as a surrogate politics'.²⁵

1.2.7 Joseph Liechty and Cecilia Clegg argue that in the context of Northern Ireland religion involves much more than doctrine. Religion must be taken seriously, as a shaper of individual and communal world view, Church institutions, community-building, as communities, as social institution and agent of socialisation, and as a source of moral formation. They conclude that, 'Making sense of the role of religion in conflict must begin with an expansive understanding of religion that can take into account its varied functions and meanings'.²⁶ They then go on to posit the view that as well as expanding our concept of religion we need to carry out a similar exercise in relation to doctrine. 'Specifically, too many people assume a definition of doctrine as intellectual propositions about religion or faith to which the believer gives rational assent. That is one kind or function of doctrine, but doctrine can have broader and more dynamic meanings as well'.²⁷ In support of this view they briefly cite the work of the theologian George Lindbeck and particularly his book, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*.²⁸ They want to use the idea of Lindbeck that religion functions as a 'cultural and /or linguistic framework' which in turn shapes the whole of life. For Lindbeck, doctrine plays the part of grammar in this framework, providing authoritative rules for a community that cover attitude, action and discourse.²⁹ They say that 'Such an understanding of religious doctrine includes intellectual propositions, but goes far beyond'.³⁰

²⁵ T.P. McCaughey, *Memory and Redemption: Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 1993) p.130.

²⁶ J. Liechty and C. Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2001) p.31.

²⁷ Liechty and Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, p.31.

²⁸ G. A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

²⁹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, pp.33, 18.

³⁰ Liechty and Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, p.31.

1.2.8 In the page previous to that quoted by Liechty and Clegg, Lindbeck writes that religions are ‘comprehensive interpretive schemes, usually embodied in myths or narratives and heavily ritualised, which structure human experience and understanding of self and world’.³¹ The addition of this to what Liechty and Clegg says clarifies the role that religion plays in Northern Ireland. All the stories and myths of the communities, which can be openly religious, quasi-religious or even secular, tie in with the doctrinal systems to provide an overarching interpretation of reality. This framework in turn then allows them to experience the world in the way we see them doing. Lindbeck gives the example that ‘Luther did not invent his doctrine of justification by faith because he had a tower experience, but rather the tower experience was made possible by his discovering (or thinking he discovered) the doctrine in the Bible’.³²

1.3 Theological Case Studies - Old and New

1.3.1 In an Irish context we can illustrate this point by Lindbeck by examining how connections are made between the suffering of Christ with the experience of Irish people and the children of Israel and the Ulster Protestants, because the communities have learnt to live in and think about the world in a way where the parameters or rules of the game are set in Northern Ireland largely by religion.³³

1.3.2 The central theological theme of all the Irish Churches has been a focus on redemption as opposed to theologies of incarnation or creation. One of the leaders of the 1916 uprising, Patrick Pearse, frequently used symbols drawn from the passion of Christ to articulate and describe the purpose of what seemed to be a futile gesture by a few against a great imperial power. The aim of Pearse was a national redemption for the Irish people. In his thought, national redemption brought together the ideas of both crucifixion and resurrection.

³¹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, p.32.

³² Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, p.39.

³³ Lindbeck borrows the image of doctrine establishing the ground rules for the game from one of the pictures the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein gives us of the role of language.

Pearse would re-enact the sacrifice of Christ, within a national context. The national sacrifice would redeem the Nation (or at least the honour of the Nation) as Christ redeemed the world. For the symbolism to be complete, the national Crucifixion and Resurrection had to take place at Easter. The Rising was originally scheduled for Easter Sunday, but that had to be changed to Easter Monday.³⁴

- 1.3.3 In more recent times during the hunger strikes of 1981 a wall mural appeared of a deliberately 'Christ-like' hunger striker with the words from the beatitudes written underneath: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice". For the Protestant community, the death of Christ also speaks of the blood sacrifice of the 36th Ulster Division at the Somme and all those who have died for their community during the 'Troubles'.³⁵ With this in mind, we can see why something like the reform of the RUC has been so painful for the Protestant community because it involves a challenge to theology, in terms of the community's theory of the atonement as well as politics.
- 1.3.4 Thus if we speak of the death of Christ in the context of Northern Ireland, of course, we can express it as theological discourse in terms of theories of the atonement. But we would miss the richness and resonance that the language has in Northern Ireland, if we fail to see the multilevelled way the language is used. In particular, it is important to notice the frequent shift of such language between the individual and the corporate body.

Let no man be mistaken as to who will be Lord in Ireland when Ireland is free. The people will be Lord and Master. The people who wept in Gethsemene, who trod the sorrowful way, who died naked on a cross, who went down into hell, will rise again glorious and immortal, will sit on the right hand of God, who will come in the end to give judgement, a judge just and terrible.³⁶

³⁴ C. Cruise O'Brien, *Ancestral Voices: Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1994) p.108.

³⁵ George Fleming, *Military Romanticism: The Somme/Orange/Drumcree Debate* (Pamphlet, Belfast 1998) compares the use made of the Battle of the Somme in the Protestant community with the use made of ancient Serbian disasters by Slobodan Milosovic in the former Yugoslavia.

³⁶ Padraic H. Pearse, *Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse: Political Writings and Speeches*. (Dublin, Phoenix co Ltd No date) p.345.

- 1.3.5 Lennon argues that, 'In Ireland, both north and south, neither the exodus nor the covenant are theological motifs that make a major impact on the life of large groups in the Catholic Church.'³⁷ In contrast, on the Protestant side, religious rhetoric and symbol drawn from exodus and especially covenant played a large part in preparing the foundations of the Northern state. In 1912 many Protestants drew up a 'covenant' which some of them signed in their own blood. The first seven signatures of the Ulster Covenant included the Church of Ireland Bishop of Down and Connor, the Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly and the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland.
- 1.3.6 Covenantal theology is a substantial theme within the reformed tradition, with a strong belief that the dealings of God with ancient Israel under the old covenant prefigures God's relationship with his Church under the new one. Thus their action hearkened back to the covenants that God made both with the people of Israel and the *Solemn League and Covenants* concluded by their ancestors, the Scottish Presbyterians, in the seventeenth century.
- 1.3.7 Akenson uses the idea of covenant in the Bible as a way of examining three communities - Afrikaners, Ulster-Scots and Israelis. For him these three communities are tied together by their understanding of how the world worked and this understanding comes from their reading of scripture. He concludes by saying that a feature of these societies is that 'To keep the deal that is the covenant, a society must be uncompromising, adamant, self-contained.'³⁸ What can tend to happen with this particular theology is that these themes can be used to show that a particular group has been specifically chosen by God, that they are different and better than other women and men because of the covenant. Hence the Ulster Scots' Protestant slogan, still used today, 'we are the people', that is, the chosen people.

³⁷ B. Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Columba, 1995) p.51.

³⁸ D.H. Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992) p.42.

1.3.8 When a group has this overarching view that they are the chosen people then it is a small step to identify Roman Catholics with the enemies of the people of Israel. The Scottish Covenanters preached when they came to Ulster that the Roman Catholics are the Amalekites.³⁹ Thus sin can be seen as mixing and compromising with the people of the land or to deny that the 'ban' is upon them is the true sin. There would be agreement that Jesus saved a person from sin, but because of the focus on the covenant and the chosenness the list of sins one was saved from is strictly delimited. The view of Jannie Malan on South Africa could equally apply to Ulster Protestants.

It is astounding how many good Christians in our land are ready to acknowledge before God that they are sinners, but who become angry if anyone suggests that their confession of guilt should include those parts of our political structure which by promoting our privilege at the expense of others, undercut the moral integrity of our people. Or will he try to assert that such things do not exist?⁴⁰

1.3.9 The Roman Catholic Church provided an identity for a people that was excluded from positions in society by law in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was discriminated against in Northern Ireland during the twentieth century. A people who saw itself as suffering readily identified with a suffering Christ. The view of Terence McSwiney, the Republican Lord Mayor of Cork (who died on hunger strike in 1920), that it was not those who could inflict the most who would win but those that were prepared to suffer the most, echoed Pearse and provided a powerful religious underpinning to subsequent Nationalist struggle. Suffering becomes a tactic, a means to an end; not something that is intrinsic to the nature of God in terms of Bonhoeffer, Moltmann and others. A dichotomy is created in this theology between suffering and love. The whole focus on love is totally left out of the use made of the crucifixion. Suffering is used not to include but to exclude. Those who do not share the end of a thirty two county Irish Republic by definition do not suffer.

³⁹ Adamson, Ian, *The Identity of Ulster*, (Belfast 1982) p.3.

⁴⁰ Quoted by Peter Hannon, *Whose Side is God on?* (Published in aid of St Patrick's, Coleraine, Restoration Fund. 1996) p.37.

1.3.10 Often the conclusion of this theology is that the only people who can be seen to share the sufferings of Christ are those of the Irish Roman Catholic community. Kennedy advances the thesis that Irish Nationalists claim to be 'Most Oppressed People Ever' (MOPE).⁴¹ In Ireland there is an interaction between the historical and political reality of oppression and discrimination and the theological appropriation of the suffering of Christ by a community. In this theology the suffering of Christ is qualitatively different from any other suffering. Therefore the empirical reality of a suffering community is taken on to a new plane by theology by its appropriation of and connection with the sufferings of Christ. By definition then, whatever is done to the other community does not matter because only the suffering of the Irish Roman Catholic people is expiatory and worth considering. The conclusion of this all is a cult of death rather than a Christian theology of the atonement. Both communities end up with the same result though by taking different routes: that is, the dehumanisation of those in the other community and the moulding of God into an ideological construct leading to the deification of Nationalism and Unionism.

1.3.11 Lennon, examining the theological tools that were available during the troubles, posits:

that there was little in the type of faith that Catholics practised that could help them to develop a more appropriate political stance. What their faith did was to console them as victims - which was important; it gave them a sense of unity and perseverance; and it may have helped many of them to renounce violence. But it did not help them to forgive their enemies in advance of any repentance. It did not help them to bring their faith to bear on politics. And it did not help them to link justice with reconciliation. Similar criticisms could also be made of Protestants.⁴²

1.3.12 Do these theological meta-narratives of the communities in Northern Ireland still continue to have resonance and power? One of the reasons that McGarry and O'Leary do not subscribe to religion being a significant actor in the Northern Irish troubles is

⁴¹ L. Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1996) p.xv.

⁴² Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.26.

that the conflict continued to get worse while the practice of religion declined. For Akenson the sense of covenant which held together Northern Irish Protestants has been fragmenting from the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. The loss of political power has meant or been aligned with the Protestant Church leaderships abandoning the idea of covenant.⁴³

1.3.13 McGarry and O’Leary show that Northern Ireland does not exist in isolation and is not immune to influences and ideas from elsewhere. For them secularism is increasingly apparent albeit at a much slower pace than elsewhere in Europe. While it is commonplace nowadays to assert that theology is contextual, Richard Clutterbuck reminds us that in the way atonement theology is used in Northern Ireland it is also inter-contextual. He speaks of how, despite all the changes undergone in Northern Ireland, the context is still ‘shaped, perhaps even more than is the case in other parts of Europe, by the myth of redemptive violence.’ The message that still strikes him from the wall murals of the Easter rising, the Somme and those of the contemporary paramilitaries is what he calls ‘a clear and chilling message: the violent shedding of blood is an essential element in saving human society and changing it for the better.’⁴⁴

1.3.14 Religion continues to be very important in Northern Ireland. Between 1950 and 2000, Mass attendance in England and Scotland declined by almost 50 per cent, and in Wales by 40 per cent, while in Northern Ireland it fell by only 10 per cent. The number of active Protestant communicants in the Church of Scotland, the Church of England and the Anglican Church in Wales fell by more than 50 per cent in the same period, but only by 20 per cent in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.⁴⁵ The standard explanation given for this is that religion in Northern Ireland has not retreated to the private sphere, there to lose its significance in the face of competing leisure interests, family pursuits and personal identities, but has remained in the public sphere as a symbol for ethnic conflicts that have kept religion alive.⁴⁶

⁴³ Akenson, *God’s Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster*, pp. 263-310.

⁴⁴ Richard Clutterbuck, ‘How Great the Debt We Owe: Can Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* say anything to Contemporary Culture?’, *Epworth Review* Volume 36 Number 1 (January 2009), p.18.

⁴⁵ Brierley, P. *UK Christian Handbook, Religious Trends No.2, 2000/01* (London: Harper Collins, 1999).

⁴⁶ John D. Brewer, ‘Are there any Christians in Northern Ireland?’, in *Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland The Eighth Report* (ed. A. M. Gray, K.Lloyd, P.Devine, G.Robinson and D.Heenan; London: Pluto, 2002), p.34.

1.3.15 If we look at what has been happening in Northern Ireland between 1991 and 1998, which was of course the year of the Good Friday Agreement as well as of the last Social Attitude survey, we see that Northern Ireland still remained a very religious society, with nearly nine out of every ten people considering themselves to belong to a Church. The Roman Catholic Church has seen the biggest drop in regular attendance, from 82 per cent attending weekly in 1991 to 67 per cent in 1998. The mainstream Protestant Churches (Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist) had the lowest regular attendance, at 29 per cent, in 1998 down from 34 per cent in 1991. When this is combined with the drop of the number of people who say they belong to these Churches from 47 to 39 per cent, it can be seen that the haemorrhaging of the main Protestant Churches is severe. The other trend within Protestantism has been the growth of conservative evangelical Churches such as the Baptists and Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterians allied with an increase in charismatic and independent house Churches and fellowships from 8 per cent in 1991 to 12 per cent in 1998.⁴⁷

1.13.16 The Churches are still the largest civil institutions in Northern Irish society. It does not necessarily follow that the political and theological concepts we have examined have declined greatly in public influence, even though the numbers of public worshippers has declined. Akenson posits the view that it will take a long time, 'more than a single generation' for the idea of covenant no longer to have an influence.⁴⁸ Oliver McTernan's criticism of McGarry and O'Leary is that they fail 'to factor in the "believing without belonging" phenomenon observed elsewhere'.⁴⁹

1.3.17 In fact one could argue that the decline in Church attendance could actually strengthen the theological ideas we have considered, with the possibility of encountering an alternative theological discourse being greatly reduced. We shall see later how difficult it has been for the Churches to have any other political theology be heard in the public sphere in any significant and powerful way. If we look at how these hegemonic theologies are disseminated, the parades commemorating both the Easter

⁴⁷ John D. Brewer, 'Are there any Christians in Northern Ireland?', p.23.

⁴⁸ Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster* pp.294.

⁴⁹ O.McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict* (London: DLT, 2003) p.87.

Rising and the Somme are still going strong, with both traditions having banners in their parades that show and teach a particular historical political theology, while the wall murals depicting these events do exactly the same.

1.3.18 The political commentator Pdraig O'Malley stresses that theological discourse has not only influenced our history but that it continues to inform current political dialogue. Indeed an understanding of theology helps to provide an understanding of the impasses that have occurred in the attempts of the two communities to find a just and lasting solution to our problems.

Language is central to the lack of understanding between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Nationalist leaders talk about 'frameworks' while unionists prefer to deal with definite proposals. The two approaches can be traced back to their theological roots before and after the Reformation. Both the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Downing Street Declaration were written in a language which Protestants could not understand. They were devised to allow for latitude-and that's what Protestants can't deal with.⁵⁰

The picture provided is that Protestants, because of the theological framework with which they operate, like words to be precise. For John Dunlop, who quotes approvingly the words of O'Malley cited above, Protestants want to get the language right first then comes the relationships. In contrast, Irish Roman Catholics stress the relationship first of all and out of the relationship words will emerge to keep the relationship together.⁵¹ McCaughey refers to this idea that words are not so important and it is relationships that count as "Irish antinomianism". He argues that this comes from the experience of the Roman Catholics as a colonised population, when they sat easily in relation to the state and its laws. However, in the last number of years more and more Roman Catholics have taken the attitude they once had to the state and applied it to the regulations and practices of their Church.⁵² The Good Friday

⁵⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 5th January 1995.

⁵¹ J. Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging Presbyterians and the Conflict in Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995) p.100.

⁵² McCaughey, *Memory and Redemption: Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland* p.53.

Agreement seems to have played a part in breaking through this historic distinction; in that a new dialectic seemed to emerge in the context of the negotiations of the agreement as new relationships developed words and the words deepened the relationships. Currently, there does seem to be an historic reversal as action or praxis is no longer being demanded from Unionists in terms of concession and institutional change but rather from Republicans, as their time in government has led to demands from them that in the past could only ever be demanded from Unionists.

1.3.19 The complex interplay in the creation of theological and political positions between story, myth, denominational allegiance, and historic and cultural circumstances can be seen in Dunlop's assertion that one of the central convictions of Irish Presbyterianism is '...a deep sense of duty rather than a concern for rights'.⁵³ Dunlop argues that this is intrinsic to Irish Presbyterianism and Irish Catholicism respectively. However, this seems much too simplistic since Presbyterians are a substantial proportion of those who have benefited from the 'Protestant parliament for a Protestant people' and are, of course, going to speak in terms of duty. Furthermore, Roman Catholics, who have been involved in a process both of being excluded and self-exclusion from society in Northern Ireland, are thus going to speak in terms of rights. This would seem to be confirmed by the proliferation in recent times of groups demanding Protestant 'rights', with a particular focus on the 'right to march'. Thus, with a decline of Protestant power and domination, Protestants began to speak in terms of rights rather than duties.⁵⁴ Indeed, we need to note that in a situation where Irish Protestants found themselves in a minority, when the southern state was formed in 1922, their whole discourse was one of demanding their rights.⁵⁵

⁵³ Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging Presbyterians and the Conflict in Ireland*, p.96.

⁵⁴ It is a moot point as to where we date this decline from. For Brewer and Higgins it should be from the imposition of Direct Rule from Westminster in 1972. 'Direct rule has limited the extent to which anti-Catholicism permeates Northern Ireland's social structure because Protestants no longer control the local state', Brewer with Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland. 1600-1998 The Mote and the Beam*, p.122. Certainly, a sense of powerlessness first became apparent in the Protestant community after their failure to destroy the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. I would argue that the real decline in Protestant power goes back at least to the 1950s where the development of neo-colonial models of trade made Ulster into an embarrassing anachronism.

⁵⁵ McCaughey, *Memory and Redemption: Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland*, p.90.

1.3.20 In the summer of 1999, Alwyn Thomson (Protestant) and Martin O'Brien (Roman Catholic) conducted a debate on the case for human rights legislation to apply within Northern Ireland. O'Brien was for and Thomson was against. It was an interesting discussion because the alternative that Thomson gives to a culture of rights is one of duty. He characterises the idea of rights as a key manifestation of what he terms as liberal fundamentalism, juxtaposing its world view with that of the Church.⁵⁶ The alternative to rights seems, therefore, to be a return to some sort of a Christendom model of society where: 'In this community we do not demand that our God given dignity be recognised, but we recognise that dignity in others and serve them, having the same mind as Christ'.⁵⁷ For him a great danger for the Church in Northern Ireland is that it should promote the idea of rights. If a society is based on rights then it will be one marked by confrontation and accusation, blame and victimhood.⁵⁸ 'It would be a tragedy, if the church in Northern Ireland, having finally broken free of its subservience to the discourse of nationalisms, were to voluntarily make itself subservient to the discourse of liberalism'.⁵⁹ Yet the alternative that Thompson presents to the discourse of rights, that of duty, is a very thinly veiled support for a social and economic status quo that he perceives as being under threat. However, the point is not to debate on rights but to see how an idea can be perceived differently within Christian traditions in Northern Ireland. An understanding of the history and use of the idea can show that something that is believed to be part of the very theological fabric can be baggage that has been picked up due to the vagaries of history and culture.

1.3.21 Here the weakness at the center of Lindbeck's argument becomes apparent. Lindbeck uses his conception of doctrine as 'cultural-linguistic' to replace what he sees as two insufficient ways of conceptualising what doctrine is all about. The first one he terms 'cognitive-propositionalist' which assumes that doctrines make first order truth claims which are either true or false. Lindbeck sees this approach as too cognitive. It limits the scope for ecumenical progress, since for movement to occur one Church must give

⁵⁶ Lion and Lamb,(Belfast: ECONI) Summer 1999, no.21 p.24.

⁵⁷ Lion and Lamb, p.26.

⁵⁸ Lion and Lamb, p.25.

⁵⁹ Lion and Lamb, p.26.

in to another in terms of the rightness or wrongness of their doctrines. The second approach which Lindbeck finds inadequate is the 'experiential-expressive' approach. This expresses the view that religion comes out of personal religious experience. Hence doctrines are not seen primarily as having cognitive content but, as he states, are manifestations of 'inner feelings, attitudes or existential orientations'.⁶⁰

1.3.22 Lindbeck is correct in broadening the scope of doctrine. Narrative and liberation theology show that the interpretive framework of which Lindbeck speaks arises within a tradition or social context which provides the categories through which people understand their lives. Hence we cannot think of personal identity aside from a communal element.⁶¹ Where Lindbeck is incorrect is in his arguing that doctrine does not function in either of the other two ways. The view that doctrine makes first order truth claims is not so important in terms of thinking on Northern Ireland, though one of the Churches' theological responses to the 'Troubles' was one of trying to work on as many doctrinal disputes as possible. The second picture of doctrine as 'experiential-expressive' is more important as it helps provide an account of how theological constructs such as 'Irish Catholics and rights' and 'Irish Presbyterians and duties' came about. In the Irish context the experience forming stress of the 'cultural-linguistic' approach needs to be held alongside and in tension with the 'experiential-expressive' approach.

1.3.23 In relation to Northern Ireland, there is a need to open up both our concept of religion and doctrine. Even so in the definitional strait jackets provided by Clayton and Whyte, a role still exists for religion and doctrine in the Northern Irish conflict. Analysing the Protestant community, Brewer and Higgins provide two axes by which can be ascertained how the Protestant community relates to the Roman Catholic one. One axis goes from low to high theological content and the other from low to high political content. So, within their schema there can be a low theological content in terms of anti-Roman Catholicism but a high political one. This would be the case with the urban based Loyalist fringe parties with connections to the Loyalist paramilitaries. It would also be the case with what are often termed as the more

⁶⁰ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, p.16.

⁶¹ G. W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

progressive people within the Ulster Unionist party. On the other side, there are those with high theological content and low political content. Thus a number of smaller Protestant groups are virulently anti-Roman Catholic theologically but see political involvement as also wrong. Then there are those with high theological and political content which are, of course, the Paisleyites and fellow travelers. It is clear that there is a recognisable group for whom the conflict is clearly about doctrine, in the sense defined by Whyte and Clayton. It may well be about other things as well but it is firstly about doctrine. What Brewer and Higgins argue throughout their work is that conservative evangelicalism provides a 'sacred canopy' over all the Protestant positions, even those where the conflict seems to be about socio-economic and constitutional issues and theology seems to be long forgotten.⁶²

1.3.24 Their analysis can be extended to provide insight into the Roman Catholic community as well, with a similar sacred canopy of Roman Catholicism and axes of theological and political content. To plot the various positions in the Roman Catholic community is to be left with more towards the secular side of the axes but still with some theological content. The insight here is that one community is not the mirror picture of the other. If they were then a solution would be much easier to find! Brewer and Higgins argue that for Republicans their 'discursive formation' is not provided by anti-Protestantism but by anti-Britishness, though one can very easily collapse into another.⁶³ The underpinning Roman Catholic political theology provides justification for political bigotry rather than religious bigotry.⁶⁴ So long as a person shares a Nationalist 'end' (a thirty two county unitary state) then they are welcome as part of the Irish people. Roman Catholic political theology cannot justify the religious bigotry of Protestantism simply because so many of the great figures in Nationalism and Republicanism have been Protestant. Though here MacCaughey comments, 'Popular Catholic nationalism has never had much time for those who are not Catholic unless pushed to it by the need to find friends or in the face of accusations of

⁶² Brewer with Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland. 1600-1998 The Mote and the Beam*, p.4.

⁶³ Brewer with Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland. 1600-1998 The Mote and the Beam*, pp.182-185.

⁶⁴ This view which sees religious bigotry on the Protestant side and political bigotry on the Catholic side was one expressed by the late Roman Catholic Primate of Ireland Tomas O'Fiach.

sectarianism'.⁶⁵ The exclusiveness on the Roman Catholic side is in terms of political not religious views.

1.4 Conclusion

1.4.1 Part of the fascinating character of theology in Northern Ireland is the multilayered nature of theological discourse in terms of how concepts symbolise different things for the different communities. Religion and theology are central to any proper understanding of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Theology is important, not just for what it stands for in itself, but because it can represent other spheres of conflict and other differences between people. It may be in these areas that we can begin to explain the ferocity of a conflict which seems to continue over sixteenth century religious cleavages that, as Whyte points out, do not cause the same problems elsewhere despite similar religious splits. But if the religious boundaries also coincide with ethnic boundaries and then we add colonialism as a cause and perpetuator of the conflict, it perhaps becomes more intelligible. It is to the questions of ethnicity and colonialism that we now turn.

⁶⁵ McCaughey, *Memory and Redemption: Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland*, p.35. Both Countess Markievicz and Roger Casement, prominent figures in the Easter Rising of 1916, subsequently converted to Roman Catholicism; it seems because of the attitude that to be 'properly' Irish you needed to be a Roman Catholic.

CHAPTER TWO

A PROBLEM FOR EVERY SOLUTION - ETHNICITY

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 If the place of religion within the conflict in Northern Ireland is contested it has at least been a constant factor in the discussions of 'conflict origins' since 1969. The newest idea in interpreting the Northern Ireland problem, appearing around 1990, has been the rise of ethnicity.

2.2 Paradigm Shift?

2.2.1 Bill Rolston contrasts the survey of the literature on the conflict produced by John Whyte in 1990 with a similar exercise carried out some five years later by McGarry and O'Leary.¹ 'Ethnicity' or 'ethnic' occurs nowhere in Whyte's index, whereas the work of McGarry and O'Leary references 'ethnicity', 'ethnic frontiers', 'ethnic groups', 'ethnic warfare', 'ethnicism' and 'ethno-nationalism'. He argues this change in academic fashion within a short period needs to be located in and explained by the transformation in global politics which took place at the end of the 1980s and in the early 90s.

2.2.2 For Rolston the paradigm shift that occurred at this time was in terms of who one drew comparisons with in order to explicate the Northern Ireland conflict. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet system within the Soviet Union and the ending of its wider hegemony, he argues that it was possible to understand Northern Ireland as an anti-colonial war in the setting of Western Europe. Beyond Europe comparisons could easily be brought out with Nicaragua, Palestine and South Africa. In the early 1990s the situations in South Africa and Palestine seemed to move towards solutions and rule in Nicaragua shifted away from the Sandinistas.

¹ Bill Rolston, 'What's Wrong with Multiculturalism? Liberalism and the Irish Conflict', in *Rethinking Northern Ireland* (ed. D. Miller; Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998), p.260. Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*. McGarry and O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images*.

With the ending of the Cold War, the conflicts which came to the fore - Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Azerbaijan, Kurdistan - were easily represented as 'ethnic', no matter how rooted they were in the structures of colonialism and global power, past and present. Moreover, many of these 'ethnic conflicts' were in Europe. Ireland it seemed was no longer unique; it could now be represented as just another 'ethnic frontier' in Europe.²

2.3 Wider History of the Term

2.3.1 Rolston is correct in as far as his argument goes. However, an examination of the wider academic literature available on ethnicity provides some further insights for the context of our discussion on Northern Ireland.

2.3.2 As a term, 'ethnicity' first appears in the English language during the 1950s, with its first entry in an English dictionary in the *Oxford English Dictionary* of 1953.³ Glazer and Moynihan, in writing one of the first academic texts concerned with 'ethnicity', state at the outset, 'Ethnicity seems to be a new term'.⁴ Tonkin, *et al*, argue that the rise in use of the term ethnicity can be connected to the post-war reaction against and avoidance of the racial doctrines of the Nazis and others propounded in the 1930s and 40s. The initial attraction of ethnicity as a term was that it could be used as a synonym for race without any biological content.

2.3.3 Adding to the impetus given for the use of 'ethnicity' by the ending of the cold war, the argument can be made that the frequent use of ethnicity in the contemporary world can also be traced to an intelligentsia's recovery of ethnic roots as a way of coping

² Bill Rolston, 'What's Wrong with Multiculturalism? Liberalism and the Irish Conflict', p.261 In fact, while Rolston does not give further details, since 1990 twenty new states have been recognised which are based upon dominant ethnic communities.

³ For a detailed history of the term see Elisabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald, and Malcolm Chapman 'History and Ethnicity', in *Ethnicity: An Oxford Reader* (ed. J.Hutchison & A.D. Smith, New York: Oxford University Press 1996), pp.18-24.

⁴ N. Glazer and D. P. Moynihan, *Ethnicity-Theory and Experience* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1975), p.1. Eriksen attributes the first use of the term to the American sociologist David Reisman in 1953. Thomas H. Eriksen 'Ethnicity, Race, Class and Nation', in *Ethnicity: An Oxford Reader*, p.28.

with the impersonality of bureaucratic rationalism.⁵ This can be seen in Northern Ireland. Around the 1980s and early 90s, Northern Ireland witnessed a revival of both the Irish language and interest in Celtic theology. In the Irish language, 1988 (Cultural Traditions Group) and 1989 (Ultach Trust) saw the formation of new bodies whose remit was to promote an apolitical approach to the language. The 1991 census recorded a large increase in interest in the language with new classes being set up in Protestant areas.⁶ The beginning of the 90s witnessed a wider resurgence of interest in Celtic spirituality and this also applied in Northern Ireland.⁷ Courses on Celtic spirituality began to appear in Protestant Churches and theological colleges. The patron saint of Ireland, Patrick, was given the honour of being painted as a wall mural in a Loyalist area.

2.3.4 What may be distinctive about Northern Ireland is that these particular revivals were certainly neither confined to nor perhaps even begun by the 'intelligentsia'. For example, various community 'think tanks' came into being in the early 1990s to initiate dialogue between the Protestant and Roman Catholic working classes, encouraging both 'traditions' to redefine their aspirations more inclusively, and to try to give 'ordinary' people a say in the peace process which they claim had been denied them. There is no theological content in their reflections, or indeed any input from the Churches. *Belfast: Faith in the City* is a report published in 2001 of a study initiated by the Irish Centre for Faith and Culture. Within that account one of the reasons given for the fracturing of the connection between the Churches and urban communities is how the rise of the community development movement in the 1990s has led to the growth of many and diverse group expressions related to housing, mutual support, family centers, planning, advice etc., which are no longer Church sponsored. This new autonomy has left many people feeling that the Churches are not relevant to social need.⁸

⁵ *Ethnicity: an Oxford Reader*, p.10.

⁶ Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster A History* p.453.

⁷ For an account of the revival in interest in Celtic spirituality see J.Gladwin, *Love and Liberty-Faith and Unity in a Postmodern Age* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd 1998), pp.100-101.

⁸ E. G. Cassidy, D.McKeown and J. Morrow, *Belfast: Faith in the City* (Dublin: Veritas 2001) p.18.

2.3.5 The rise in the 1990s of ‘ethnicity’ as an explanation for the conflict has also facilitated the exploration of the conflict by the community development movement outside the explicit framework of religion and so we see a broadening out both of links and concerns. The publications produced by groups set up as community think tanks from 1992-1999 provide a flavour of this. 1. *Life on the Interface*: Report of a 1992 conference of Belfast ‘peace-line’ community groups. 2. *Sacrifice of the Somme*: The story of Ulster’s ‘cross-community’ sacrifice at the battle of the Somme. 3. *Ulster’s Scottish Connection*: An exploration of the links between the people of Ulster and Scotland. 4. *Idle Hours*: Belfast working-class poetry. 5. *Expecting the Future*: A play focussing on the emotional effects of Northern Ireland’s violence. 6. *Ulster’s Shared Heritage*: An exploration of the *shared* historical inheritance of the Ulster people. 7. *The Cruthin Controversy*: An examination of how academics and others have tried to misrepresent those who seek to reveal the shared inheritance of the Ulster people. 8. *Ulster’s European Heritage*: A celebration of the many links between Ulster and Europe. 9. *Ulster’s Protestant Working Class*: A community exploration; includes a postscript on the IRA ceasefire. 10. *The Battle of Moira*: An adaptation of Sir Samuel Ferguson’s epic poem *Congal*. 11. *Beyond the Fife and Drum*: Account of a forward-looking conference held on Belfast’s Shankill Road. 12. *Belfast Community Economic Conference*: Report of a conference initiated by grassroots community groups in Belfast. 13. *A New Beginning*: The Shankill Think Tank outlines its vision for the future. 14. *Reinforcing Powerlessness*: How the voice of ordinary people has been ignored by decision makers. 15. *Ourselves Alone?*: The Falls Think Tank gives a voice to Belfast’s Nationalist working class. 16. *Hidden Frontiers*: Addressing deep-rooted violent conflict in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Moldova. 17. *The Death of the Peace Process?*: A survey of community perceptions. 18. *At the Crossroads?*: Further explorations by the Shankill Think Tank. 19. *Conflict Resolution: The Missing Element in the Northern Ireland Peace Process* The lessons learned from Northern Irish based conflict resolution efforts in Moldova. 20. *Young People Speak Out*: Newhill Youth Development Team discuss the needs of Nationalist working-class youth. 21. *Puppets No More*: An exploration of socio-economic issues facing the Protestant working class in east Belfast. *Beyond King Billy?*: The Ballymacarrett Think Tank in east Belfast explores cultural

and identity related issues. *Are We Not Part of This City Too?: The Waterside Think tank* highlights Protestant working-class alienation in Derry.

2.4 What is an 'ethnic' explanation trying to say?

2.4.1 Weber's classical definition of ethnicity is:

We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.⁹

Whenever a group exists, there is both a boundary and a mechanism to maintain that boundary. These provide cultural markers of difference between groups. Manning Nash argues that there are three common boundary markers of ethnicity. First there is *kinship* - 'the presumed biological and descent unity of the group implying a stuff or substance continuity each group member has and outsiders do not'.¹⁰ Secondly, there is *commensality* which is 'the propriety of eating together indicating a kind of equality, peership, and the promise of further kinship links stemming from the intimate acts of dining together'.¹¹ Finally there is *common cult* which implies 'a value system beyond time and empirical circumstances'.¹² For Nash these cultural markers of kinship, commensality, and religious cult, or blood, substance and deity, both symbolise the existence of the group and constitute the group. It is the presence of these cultural markers that separates ethnic groups from other types of groups or entities.¹³ To give an explanation of the Northern Irish conflict in terms of 'ethnicity' is to see religion as being primarily one of the signs of identity in the situation of inter group conflict that exists.

⁹ Max Weber 'The Origins of Ethnic Groups', in *Ethnicity: an Oxford Reader*, p.35.

¹⁰ Manning Nash 'The Core Elements of Ethnicity', in *Ethnicity: an Oxford Reader*, p.25.

¹¹ Manning Nash 'The Core Elements of Ethnicity', in *Ethnicity: an Oxford Reader*, p.25.

¹² Manning Nash 'The Core Elements of Ethnicity', in *Ethnicity: an Oxford Reader*, p.25.

¹³ Manning Nash 'The Core Elements of Ethnicity', in *Ethnicity: an Oxford Reader*, p.25.

2.5 History of 'Ethnicity' within Northern Ireland

2.5.1 The term 'ethnic' first appeared in popular discourse within Northern Ireland at the end of the 1980s in the Protestant community. It was believed that the IRA campaign against the locally recruited Security Forces, particularly part-time members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Ulster Constabulary in border areas, was targeted deliberately on eldest sons and wage earners as a way to drive Protestants from the land and so was referred to as 'ethnic cleansing'.¹⁴ However, it should be pointed out that the lack of 'ethnic' references in the academic literature prior to the late 1980s does not mean that there were not 'ethnic' explanations of the conflict prior to them actually being labeled as such. For example, the work of the 'Faith and Politics' group has all the characteristics of an ethnic explanation of the troubles without calling it that. This may well be due to the influence of one of the ethnic theorists, Frank Wright, upon the group. We see the continuity from the explanation provided for the conflict in *Breaking Down the Enmity* as the documents produced by the group slip seamlessly into the use of language of those who favour an ethnic explanation of the conflict. This language developed such terms in the 1990s as 'parity of esteem' and 'two traditions' and we see this in documents produced by the group such as: *New Pathways Developing a Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (1997) and *Doing Unto Others: Parity of Esteem in a Contested Space* (1997). The 2001 document *Transitions* speaks explicitly of the connection in Northern Ireland of religious and ethnic identity.

2.5.2 Frank Wright, as a political scientist and active member of the Corrymeela Community,¹⁵ was one of the first people to put the concept of 'ethnicity', and 'ethnic frontiers', at the center of analysis as he compared the conflict in the North with Prussian Poland, Bohemia under Austrian rule, Algeria under French rule, and the American south. He also looks at how Northern Ireland relates to other situations, such as Lebanon and Cyprus, where rival outside powers make the conflict worse and

¹⁴ C. Ryder, *The Ulster Defence Regiment: An Instrument of Peace?* (London 1991) p.123.

¹⁵ In the dedications for his book, F. Wright, *Northern Ireland a Comparative Analysis* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1987) p.xvi he mentions Ray Davey and John Morrow (respectively the founder and leader of the Corrymeela Community) and the Corrymeela Community.

argues that Northern Ireland is a prime example of a case where an internal conflict is shaped by the fact that it is also a frontier region. For Wright, 'ethnic frontiers' are 'places where the populations of citizen and native were fairly evenly balanced numerically'.¹⁶ In the examples he cites, he sees the same forces at work: that of a metropolitan power which is then linked to an ethnic group in the area in question. This central power is then pulled by the ethnic group further than it wants to go. The conclusion of his analysis is not terribly hopeful. Of all these cases he looks at, the only one which has had anything like even a neutral outcome has been the American south, with the reason for this seeming to be that no outside power has come in to exacerbate the conflict. In all the other situations, the problem is only solved by mass flights of population (Prussia, Poland, Bohemia, Algeria), still rumbling on despite mass expulsions (Cyprus), or is continuing to fester like in the Lebanon. His aim was to delegitimise the violence in the north and to support the Anglo-Irish Agreement. As well, he wanted to demonstrate, by his comparative analysis, how Britain and Ireland, as the extrinsic forces involved in Northern Ireland, could avoid producing similar undesirable consequences as external powers have done in other places.¹⁷

2.5.3 The strength of Wright's analysis is both the dynamic picture of the nature of the conflict which he paints and how the violence of the situation is part of this dynamism which transfigures the boundary markers over which most of the debate concerning the conflict is conducted. He writes, 'Representative violence creates deterrence communities and the symbols which denote them (i.e. their markers) are ultimately of little consequence: all that matters is their mutually threatening character and the dissolution of all politically transcendent values or institutions which might bind them together.'¹⁸ For Wright, what the conflict has actually done is to destroy politics, as well as the markers or symbols by dissolving 'all politically transcendent values or institutions'. Wright talks of 'crises which are about everything and nothing at the same time and which can develop into a chaos which makes a nonsense of everything they are ostensibly about'.¹⁹ In his book, Wright is examining situations which are in

¹⁶ Wright, *Northern Ireland a Comparative Analysis* p.1.

¹⁷ Wright, *Northern Ireland a Comparative Analysis* p.274.

¹⁸ Wright, *Northern Ireland a Comparative Analysis* pp.47-48.

¹⁹ Wright, *Northern Ireland a Comparative Analysis* p.xv.

crisis. One of the tasks of the various academic disciplines which have looked at the situation in Northern Ireland is to show how the content of our various markers have actually shaped the path to the crisis situation of the 'Troubles'. It is important to have this knowledge because for Wright the answer to the conflict is struggling to restore 'politically transcendent values or institutions'. In this restorative process where 'all things are made new'²⁰ the content of markers, including religion, will make a reappearance. The question is whether in doing so they impede or facilitate and advance the process. For all his stress on ethnicity, Wright is very clear that when a boundary marker has a cultural content, as does religion, then not only is it likely to figure in the conduct of the conflict, but that it has the potential to be part of the progress towards peace. For Frank Wright this was the challenge to the Churches of the conflict we found ourselves in. They may have helped get us in this fine mess but they also had the potential to help us get out of it.

2.5.4 Around the same time as Wright was putting forward his ideas, O'Sullivan put forward the view that the Northern Ireland conflict could be seen as developing in three stages of 'ethnic stratification'.²¹ By the early 1990s Bill Rolston writes, 'an internal conflict explanation resting on 'ethnicity' had become fashionable in academic circles'.²² This may be true of some of the people Rolston cites but it is very unfair on Wright.²³ Indeed, Whyte points out that one of the strengths of Wright is his interest in the interaction of internal and external factors of the conflict.²⁴

2.5.5 The strength of ethnicity would seem to be that it provides an over-arching concept within which one can fit such things as religion, constitutional questions, culture and class. It provides an empathetic approach to the conflict and would seem to have the potential to be a neutral descriptive term with which one can then work. There is a

²⁰ Revelation 21:5.

²¹ K.S. O'Sullivan *First World Nationalisms: Class and Ethnic Politics in Northern Ireland and Quebec*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

²² Bill Rolston, "What's Wrong with Multiculturalism? Liberalism and the Irish Conflict", in *Rethinking Northern Ireland*, p.260.

²³ He quotes from Bruce, Hayes and Darby. Rolston, 'What's Wrong with Multiculturalism? Liberalism and the Irish Conflict', pp.260-261.

²⁴ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.201.

sense that as Irish society as a whole has become more secular 'ethnicity' provides a way of describing Protestant-Catholic difference one step removed from any religious content given to that difference. This after all would seem to chime with most people's experience of the conflict as one where the difference between the communities is obviously about religion yet somehow it is not. Ethnicity brings into play all the other 'cultural stuff' involved in life in Northern Ireland. It has allowed the exploration of other aspects of the conflict apart from religion and has given rise to the language of 'parity of esteem' and 'two traditions' which have played a central part in the debates of the 1990s leading to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

2.6 What is the Problem with Ethnicity?

2.6.1 The first criticism made of ethnicity is that it does not allow diversity to flourish and it does this in the name of diversity! The focus on 'parity of esteem' as a result of the stress on ethnicity always involves only two players. This Rolston argues overlooks 'the real diversity and conflict within each 'tradition''.²⁵ This is particularly difficult for those who have broken from their traditions, such as socialists, gays and lesbians, feminists or even theological liberals and radicals. The result of the two traditions paradigm which now operates is that everything is squeezed into an ethnicity, and thus two traditions, framework; when perhaps other ways of looking at an issue would be more valid. In Northern Ireland the idea of ethnicity seems to pander to the most conservative voices in both traditions and encourages the traditions to be seen and develop as mirror images of each other which is not historically or theologically accurate, and can lead to political inertia. By its nature, ethnicity theory *per se* finds it problematic to accommodate multifarious voices. Weber points out that 'behind all ethnic diversities there is somehow naturally the notion of the 'chosen people''.²⁶ This makes it extremely difficult for ethnicity theory to allow the emergence of the hidden histories and a diversity of voices within Northern Ireland. A theory which was supposed to facilitate dialogue actually seems to pander to what are the worst elements in the traditions which is that they are chosen people by God.

²⁵ Bill Rolston, 'What's Wrong with Multiculturalism? Liberalism and the Irish Conflict', p.270.

²⁶ Max Weber 'The Origins of Ethnic Groups', in *Ethnicity: an Oxford Reader*, p.37.

2.6.2 Part of the criticism of 'ethnicity' is that it appears to operate in the neutral descriptive way we have described above. Clayton complains that speaking about ethnic groups does not in and by itself say anything about inequalities in power and so questions of justice are disposable when the conflict is seen in ethnic terms. For her any neutrality in the term must be viewed as a weakness rather than a strength.²⁷ This neutrality that seems to be a part of a concept of ethnicity is seen as leading to the marginalisation of the disadvantage suffered by the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland, in that any notion of blame for injustice gets excluded from the equation. Clayton argues that the use of ethnicity conceals both the historical origins of the divisions in Northern Ireland and the inequalities that still exist.²⁸

2.6.3 Yet, it is not inevitable that it does this. Robbie McVeigh is right when he posits the view that ethnicity 'should be able to make sense not only of asymmetries of power but also asymmetries of value'.²⁹ Any theory of ethnicity must be able either to critique or to facilitate critiques of ethnicity which are in McVeigh's terms 'pathological', such as the notion of 'whiteness' in Southern Africa under apartheid. McVeigh connects the discussion of ethnicity with that of sectarianism which he argues is a form of racism. Tonkin, *et al*, state that 'the discourse of race is an essential background to any concern with ethnicity today'.³⁰ McVeigh argues that any theory of ethnicity in Northern Ireland must have both content and teeth. There must always be the possibility that one side can be, in a sense, closer to the truth than the other on a particular issue. If it includes the discourse of sectarianism and thus race McVeigh finds it acceptable to use ethnicity to explicate Northern Ireland; 'sectarianism' for him is about ethnicity much more than it is about religion.³¹

²⁷ Pamela Clayton, 'Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict', p.52.

²⁸ Pamela Clayton, 'Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict', p.53.

²⁹ Robbie McVeigh, 'Is Sectarianism Racism?' p.194

³⁰ Tonkin et al 'History and Ethnicity', p.21.

³¹ Robbie McVeigh, 'Is Sectarianism Racism?' p.195.

2.6.4 The dangers for those who advocate ethnicity theory are that the conflict becomes socio-psychological, and history becomes depoliticised. 'There is no structural level. Colonialism, politics, triumphalism, institutionalised discrimination, state power - all are left behind when entering this multicultural world. When structure is referred to at all, it is usually only in relation to group dynamics.'³² In many ways ethnicity has ended up operating as a residual category in Northern Ireland. It gathers other explanations into itself and provides something to fall back upon when these are found wanting. The other side of this argument portrayed by Wright is the tendency in Northern Ireland to engage in what he terms 'militant self-righteousness'.³³ It is worth quoting him in full:

There is a big difference between seeing the injustice perpetrated through the existence of force relationships and moral judgments about people trapped in their core. Rationalistic understanding often fastens onto concepts such as 'colonialism', 'racism', 'fascism', 'self-determination of nations' (one or two!) And having done so, many read backwards into the situation all manner of motives and interests which are perceived as necessary ingredients of the chosen explanation. In doing so they fail to see that what they are doing is erecting a moral barrier between themselves and whatever people they find guilty of the 'problem'.³⁴

I have heard this referred to in Northern Ireland as 'what about-ism'. This is when you cannot say anything about one side because the other will reply 'what about....' So guilt is always projected to the other. The critique we find here in Wright of equality of sin and guilt has been an important theme running through ecumenical theology.

2.6.5 Wright is accused by Clayton as implying that 'both reason and ethics should be excluded from social science'.³⁵ Yet, it seems clear from the quotation above that

³² Bill Rolston, 'What's Wrong with Multiculturalism? Liberalism and the Irish Conflict', p.268.

³³ Wright, *Northern Ireland a Comparative Analysis* p.xiii.

³⁴ Wright, *Northern Ireland a Comparative Analysis* pp.xii-xiii.

³⁵ Pamela Clayton, 'Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict', p.52.

Wright is not excluding discussion about injustice. He is rather flagging up the danger of imposing a prior understanding on the situation and with a one size fits all approach seeing one side alone as the 'problem'. Here writ large is the difference between ecumenical theology as represented by Wright and the Faith and Politics Group and prophetic theology as represented by Irish Kairos and those writers gathered around *Rethinking Northern Ireland*.³⁶

2.7 Conclusion

2.7.1 I want to suggest that some of the difficulties with the use of ethnicity in Northern Ireland also reflects the problematic relationship between the terms ethnicity and nationality. Eriksen points out there is a strong connection between the terms as both stress the cultural similarity of their groups and in doing this inevitably draw boundaries which then exclude others and make them outsiders. What distinguishes nationalism from ethnicity is that by definition a nationalist relates to a state. In the ideal nationalist world, political and cultural boundaries would coincide. It may happen that a group looks for this to happen and, of course, then it becomes a nationalist movement. But some ethnic groups do not seek to form themselves into a state.³⁷ It is not a caricature to say that those opposed to using ethnicity in relation to Northern Ireland are writing from a broadly Nationalist perspective. I am unsure whether the dynamic at work in their writing here is that from a Nationalist point of view the fear is that by conceding an ethnic identity to Protestantism, then they are inevitably blessing a claim that it should have a territorial expression of this ethnicity? Or is it the fear that by seeing the identity of the Roman Catholic community in ethnic terms, it may be viewed that this ethnic identity does not necessarily have to have a Nationalist expression in terms of a nation being co-terminus with a culture? It would not be unusual for Northern Ireland, even in

³⁶ *Rethinking Northern Ireland* provides a coherent and critical alternative account of the Northern Ireland conflict. Most writing on Northern Ireland is informed by British propaganda, unionist ideology or the currently popular 'ethnic conflict' paradigm which allows analysis to wallow in a fascination with tribal loyalty. *Rethinking Northern Ireland* sets the record straight by re-embedding the conflict in Ireland in the history of and literature on imperialism and colonialism.' Cover jacket of *Rethinking Northern Ireland* (ed. D. Miller; Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998).

³⁷ Thomas H. Eriksen 'Ethnicity, Race, Class and Nation', in *Ethnicity an Oxford Reader*, p.30.

terms of academic writing, that two incompatible viewpoints should be held at the same time which seems to be the case here.

2.7.2 Those who are opposed to the contemporary stress on ethnicity in Northern Ireland do so because they wish to give greater weight to colonialism as an explanation for the conflict. This is the third explanation for the conflict which will now be examined.

CHAPTER THREE

A PROBLEM FOR EVERY SOLUTION - COLONIALISM

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Gerry Adams, writing from Long Kesh prison claimed, 'Violence in Ireland is a result of British Imperialism, of the British connection and the British presence.'¹ For the 1970s Sinn Fein leader, Daithai O'Conaill, members of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland were to be seen clearly as part of a colonial class which gave its allegiance to Britain:

The reality is that they are a colon class. They are the settler class that arose out of the plantation. Republicans accept that fact, and the fact that they are of colonial breed. But they've been here for so long that they're part and parcel of the Irish nation, and we feel their place is in the body politic as such, in the nation as a whole.²

In the view of O'Conaill, the "colons" in Northern Ireland need to be treated in the same way that the pro-French Algerians were brought into line when they opposed the granting of independence to Algeria.³ Yet, in academic representations of the troubles the view of O'Conaill that the conflict can be described in terms of colonialism or that Northern Ireland should be viewed in some sense as a colony of Britain is under-represented compared to advocates of 'religious' or 'ethnicity' theories of the conflict. Miller places 'the vast bulk of literature' on Northern Ireland in this category. He cites one study of the anthropological literature which argues that in that particular academic discipline no study has referred to Northern Ireland as being a colonial situation.⁴ Whyte does not put it as strongly but states that 'the colonial parallel has

¹ *Republican News*, 11 September 1976.

² P.O'Malley, *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today* (Belfast, Blackstaff 1983), p.298.

³ O'Malley, *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today*, pp.298 - 9.

⁴ David Millar, 'Colonialism and Academic Representations of the Troubles' in *Rethinking Northern Ireland* (ed. D. Miller; Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998), p.3.

not been so convincing that it has generally been adopted by writers on the Northern Ireland problem'.⁵

3.2 The History

3.2.1 The less contentious position is that the analogy of colonialism is appropriate when applied to the whole of Ireland under the British before partition in 1921. Writing about the constitutional background to the Northern Irish situation Alan Ward demonstrates that the debates over proposals for home rule in 1886, 1893, and 1914 were constituted in terms of whether to make Ireland a self governing colony or not. The argument on the Unionist side was not posited in terms of a rejection of colonial status but rather that Ireland was 'too close to Britain, too important militarily, economically, and politically, to follow or be allowed to follow the colonies' course to dominion status and independence'.⁶ Both sides in the debate accepted the colonial status of Ireland. The question at issue was how special a colony it was?

3.2.2 When we turn to the North, it is historical fact that settlers from England and Scotland came to Ulster in the seventeenth century. As in other examples of settler colonialism, such as Algeria and South Africa, this helped produce a lasting division of the population. Whyte points out that the Unionist argument that Northern Ireland has never legally been a colony, but part of the United Kingdom, does not destroy the argument. Algeria, Angola and Mozambique were part of France and Portugal respectively; but they were still treated as non-metropolitan parts of the state with both countries ceding the territory when they had to. He makes the further point that the record over the years of opinion polls on the British mainland is that much of the opinion there is in favour of pulling out of Northern Ireland, which would suggest that Northern Ireland is not considered to be part of their country.⁷

⁵ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.178.

⁶ Alan J. Ward, 'A Constitutional Background to the Northern Ireland Crisis', in *Northern Ireland and the Politics of Reconciliation* (ed. D. Keogh and M. H. Haltzel; Cambridge: New York, 1994), p.41.

⁷ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.178

3.3 Settler Society

3.3.1 The particular model of colonialism that is applied to Northern Ireland is that of settler colonialism. This is where a group of settlers either from, or with the backing of, the imperial power dispossess the natives. Apposite parallels of settler colonialism in Northern Ireland have been drawn with Algeria, Israel, Rhodesia, Kenya and South Africa.⁸ Clayton characterises basic features of a settler society as including ‘the ‘fixity’ of the basic ideology, which arises from the need to defend interests; the fear and hatred of change; and the intransigence of fixed positions’. She also goes on to point out how the pattern of class relations that one finds in Northern Ireland is typical for a settler society, i.e. with intra class solidarity being stressed in the face of the threat from the natives.⁹ Thus, socialist parties struggle to make an impact in settler societies due to the determination of the settlers to retain power. Anyone who steps out of line to offer friendship or concessions to the natives is labeled as being a traitor.¹⁰ Democracy is trumpeted as a value of the settlers but is only partial in its application and every effort is made to exclude the natives from its application.¹¹ Furthermore, she argues that despite any changes in the outward rule of the North, in the move for example to Direct Rule from Westminster in 1972, the settler mentality in Northern Ireland has proved to be exceedingly durable and many of the continuing conflicts today, in terms of the lack of votes for non-sectarian parties and the continuing economic gap between Protestants and Roman Catholics, can be traced to its persistence.¹²

⁸ See for example on the parallel with South Africa: A. Guelke, *Northern Ireland the International Perspective* (Dublin, Gill & Macmillan 1988).

⁹ I have come across Nationalist graffiti which adopted the Pan African Congress slogan ‘one settler, one bullet’.

¹⁰ Pamela Clayton, ‘Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict’, p.51. Clayton paints rather a broad picture here. The history of the labour movement in Northern Ireland is not entirely one of failure. While the socialist ideals of the founders of Zionism alongside the relative electoral success of the Israeli Labour Party also bear close examination in terms of the relationship between settlers and socialism.

¹¹ Hence the contradiction between the Unionist Party proclaiming the economic and social advantages of being part of the United Kingdom with their refusal to extend the local government franchise to every householder as in the rest of the United Kingdom which led to the ‘one man, one vote’ campaign of the Civil Rights Movement; and the block voting of Unionist M.Ps against the Beveridge report, yet taking credit for the benefits it brought to Northern Ireland compared to the poor benighted Irish Republic.

¹² Pamela Clayton, ‘Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict’, p.50.

3.3.2 There is a widespread view that settler colonialism is important in tracing the origins of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Wright, examining the system of communal deterrence that has grown up between the communities, talks of how the pattern of farmholding to this day largely reflects that of the original plantations of the seventeenth century. Protestants tended to more concentrated in the lowland areas with Roman Catholics on the higher ground and thus are disproportionately represented among the very poor hill farmers.¹³ O'Leary and McGarry speak of how this dispossession of the natives led to a 'legacy of bitterness' and that the model of settler colonialism explains very well the past experience of historic Ulster.¹⁴

3.4 A Question of Bias?

3.4.1 The dispute as to the validity of the model of colonialism for explaining the conflict is not in terms of the light that it throws on the wrongs of the past; but whether or not it is a key motivator of the conflict from 1969 onwards. The question is not whether Northern Ireland ever was a colony of Britain but whether it continues to be so?

3.4.2 Millar poses the question as to when Northern Ireland actually ceased to be a colony? Was it with the Government of Ireland Act in 1920? Or in 1921 after the withdrawal of British forces from the Irish Free State? When Britain had no real economic interest in Ireland after 1945? Or when Direct Rule was imposed from Westminster in 1972? When British strategic interests declined in the 1970s and 1980s and especially after 1989?¹⁵ Whyte, writing on the lack of a colonial analysis on the part of academic consideration of the Northern Ireland conflict, points out that those who do not use this model do not give reasons for their refusal to use it. They 'simply remain silent on the subject, and do not actually argue the case against employing it'.¹⁶

¹³ Wright, *Northern Ireland a Comparative Analysis*, p.144

¹⁴ McGarry and O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images*, p.334.

¹⁵ David Millar, 'Colonialism and Academic Representations of the Troubles', in *Rethinking Northern Ireland*, pp.3-4.

¹⁶ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.178.

3.4.3 Millar is very clear as to the reasons behind this omission, 'The colonial dimension is a fundamental part of the conflict in Ireland and this has been ignored by the vast majority of academics writing to Northern Ireland, especially those from a British or unionist background or from a certain segment of Northern or Southern society'.¹⁷ For Millar, a version of the theory of hegemony needs to be employed in order to explain this. The dominant explanations (i.e. ethnicity and religion) of the conflict in the North are marked by the ideologies of colonialism and neocolonialism. Thus, the lack of colonial explanations is actually to be accounted for by the hegemony of colonialism which discounts colonialism as legitimate evidence. The colonial relationship that continues to exist has fundamentally distorted writing on the conflict. These are strong charges against the majority of academics who have written on Northern Ireland, who are accused of giving in to state coercion in the content of their work, and indeed for those Church, Community Groups and Political Parties who have used their analysis as a basis for their praxis.¹⁸

3.5 A Loaded Term

3.5.1 Whyte points out that for one to label a situation 'colonial' implied two things: firstly, that it was illegitimate, and secondly, that it was unlikely to last.¹⁹ The critique of ethnicity by the majority of writers gathered around *Rethinking Northern Ireland* was that in practise the use of ethnicity failed to take seriously the oppression of the Nationalist community. Whyte shows that the attraction of the 'colonial' model is the complete opposite. It is a loaded term in favour of those who are the colonised and against those who are construed as being the settlers. Thus the inevitable construals of applying a model of colonialism to the contemporary situation in Northern Ireland, in terms of its automatic taking of sides and judgement on the legitimacy or rather illegitimacy of the Northern Irish state, is the reason so many academics are reluctant to use it rather than being the result of any state coercion. This would also explain the point which exasperates Millar that a number of writers on the conflict are prepared to use a colonial model to explain the origins of the conflict in the past, but are much

¹⁷ David Millar, 'Colonialism and Academic Representations of the Troubles', p.36.

¹⁸ David Millar, 'Colonialism and Academic Representations of the Troubles', p.36.

¹⁹ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.178.

more reluctant to judge the present situation in this way. Those who espouse colonialism as a contemporary model would argue they are wrong; but they must at least be entitled to the view that 'once colonial' does not have to mean 'always colonial'.

3.6 A Question of History?

3.6.1 Whyte does in fact answer Millar's challenge to name a date for when the North ceased to become a colony, by stating clearly that the analogy of colonialism works best when 'applied to the whole of Ireland when under British rule before 1921'.²⁰ He sums up the state of play in the literature very fairly when he speaks of an 'implicit majority view in the literature that, while the 'colony' model illustrates some features of the Northern Ireland problem, the 'ethnic conflict-zone' model is more generally appropriate'.²¹ The problem for those using a colonial model is its all or nothing nature. Thus, sectarian division is and is only 'the result of colonialism'.²² There is no sense that colonialism could have played a role in exacerbating existing divisions or indeed have been completely separate from sectarianism. Clayton admits that the Scottish Presbyterians who settled Antrim and Down were not part of the plantation, but were part of the natural movement of populations that had existed for centuries between coastlines that at their closest are nineteen miles apart. As Elliott states: 'At a time when voyages of discovery and colonisation were in vogue in Europe, a natural migration of peoples from Scotland and England to Ulster was already under way before the official plantation was conceived'.²³ The Scottish Presbyterian part of this population movement and not the 'official' colonisers are of course the residual Protestant population of Northern Ireland today, and it is among their number that the greatest degree of sectarianism is to be found.²⁴

²⁰ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.179.

²¹ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.179.

²² David Millar, 'Colonialism and Academic Representations of the Troubles', p.10.

²³ Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster A History*, p.86.

²⁴ Pamela Clayton, 'Religion, Ethnicity and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict', p.46.

3.6.2 Here it is apparent that the difficulty in the adoption of a colonial model for many people is the embroilment in a historical discussion where one may have no expertise to judge between the arguments. If one adopts a 'religious' or 'ethnicity' model, one can begin in the present with one's own interest or academic discipline. There are two communities now and they are divided and that is what 'religious' and 'ethnicity' models deal with. The past may help to illustrate the thesis but one is operating primarily in the present. Colonialism by its nature inevitably points to the past rather than the present in order to justify any assertions made and very few of us are qualified to do this. For example, in looking at the plantation, Elliott points out how little we know about the ordinary people, the 'churls'. She speculates that they may well have fared a good deal better under the new situation than under the old Gaelic land system. However, the elite did not and it is their voice we hear. Furthermore, it is the decline in status of the 'elite' at the plantation with importance coming to be measured in land rather than lineage which most determined their reaction rather than actual dispossession.²⁵ Also, 'Few Gaelic Lords would handle the new rent and money economy well and indebtedness was to cause more loss of land than confiscation'.²⁶ The plantation itself was carried through 'with considerable co-operation from the Ulster Irish'.²⁷ It was not just Scottish Presbyterians who streamed to the north of Ireland but also Scottish Catholics, especially in Antrim.²⁸

3.6.3 Neither is this purely an academic exercise. Elliott posits the view that the campaign against Protestant border farmers during the troubles was justified by referring to the suffering of Roman Catholics at the plantation and stating that the settlers and their descendants are Un-Irish.²⁹ 'Colonialism' as an explanation depends much more than 'religion' and 'ethnicity' of the veracity of a particular, contested historical account in order to power it as an explanation for the contemporary conflict.

²⁵ Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster A History*, p.84.

²⁶ Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster A History*, p.87.

²⁷ Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster A History* p.89.

²⁸ Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster A History*, p.87.

²⁹ Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster A History*, p.84.

3.6.4 There is some consensus that the history of Northern Ireland is both colonial and non-colonial. The question is on how much weight you give to the natural movement of closely related peoples or to the formal colonial and plantation process. A criticism of the ethnicity model is how it finds it difficult to accommodate minority voices and opinions outside the rigid framework of 'two traditions'.³⁰ Yet the concept of 'ethnicity' cannot be criticised for its rigidity and then colonial theorists provide a completely rigid view of the settler/native distinction. One of the complexities of Northern Irish history has been the lack of rigid lines between the settlers and natives. The increasing stress on this has been one of the features of Northern Irish historiography in the past twenty years.³¹ That there is no visible distinction, in terms of race or colour, between settlers and natives mean that the absolute lines we like to draw between the communities do not in fact coalesce with the fault lines of history. To give a few very simple examples. Adams is one of the most prominent planter names. One of the great native names is O'Neill and Terence O'Neill was a Unionist Prime-Minister. A contemporary Northern Irish Roman Catholic Priest has a direct ancestor who was a Presbyterian clergyman hung by Roman Catholic militia in the pay of the crown for rebelling against the British in 1798. William Murphy was an eighteen year old member of the Thirty Sixth Ulster Division (a man with a settler Christian name and a native surname) who died at the Battle of the Somme in 1916 wearing his Orange Sash. Of course, one should not need lessons that life is complicated. But sometimes in Northern Ireland the lesson needs to be learned, and the use of colonialism as the primary motivating force behind the conflict draws lines where they perhaps should not be drawn.

3.6.5 For Whyte the reason an 'ethnicity' explanation works (though he refers to it as the 'zone of ethnic conflict model') for so many writers, is that this model better explains the intractability of the situation than a colonial model. Once the imperial power departs very often a colonial situation will be ended, while an ethnic conflict will remain as long as the competing groups continue to exist. Whyte points out that in a number of places the departure of the imperial power has often exacerbated the

³⁰ See p.42.

³¹ Of course, Miller and others have always the option that this historical revisionism is ideologically motivated!

conflict.³² This has always been one of the fears that the situation in Northern Ireland would be in fact worsened rather than improved by Britain pulling out. There has been a paradigm shift in the Republican movement over the past fifteen years. It has moved from what is termed as a 'false consciousness' approach to Irish unity (that once the British pull out the Protestants would realise that they were really Irish and everything would be fine), to a recognition that the problem is no longer British imperialism, but the one million Protestants who do not wish to be part of a united Ireland. This change would seem to contradict Millar's bald statement that Ulster is 'a colonial possession which the British state has tried to present as an integral part of the state'.³³ The analysis of the Republican movement, in terms of the conflict, has been one of colonialism, but in practice it has become one of ethnicity.

3.6.6 In terms of the change of Republican praxis, if not analysis, the best illustration of this is the Good Friday Agreement. For Republicans, the union, that is, the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, and imperialism are synonymous. However, according to the Agreement, the union will still stand and the constitutional status of Northern Ireland is a question only for the people of Northern Ireland. We can extend Millar's question by posing it to Republicans as well: how and when did imperialism disappear from Northern Ireland? It seems that in practice it left on Good Friday 1998, but somehow without the colonial power actually going. This conceptual confusion would seem to suggest that 'colonialism' is not the best explanation for the Northern Irish 'Troubles'.

3.7 Conclusion

3.7.1 In conclusion, both Whyte and the 'implicit majority view in the literature' are correct that the model of colonialism does give us insight into some features of the Northern Ireland problem which 'ethnicity' and 'religion' neglect. This is particularly true in explaining the socioeconomic and political power of Protestants and their feelings of dominance, ascendancy and superiority allied with a sense of threat, fear

³² For example Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Cyprus and Lebanon . Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p.179.

³³ David Millar, 'Colonialism and academic representations of the troubles', in *Rethinking Northern Ireland*, p4. It was this realisation on the part of the Republican leadership which led to tentative contacts with the Protestant community towards the end of the 1980s and ultimately to the ceasefire of 1994.

and grievance. As Brewer and Higgins demonstrate, this side of things is 'similar to colonial settings elsewhere in which religion is absent'.³⁴ However the model of ethnicity provides a better explanation for the troubles but it seems to me that the key to understanding the situation is to be found in religion. This is certainly a minority view. But I would argue that of the three explanations only with the removal of religion could we conceivably imagine the conflict not happening. Religion alone has the power to sustain the conflict while the other two, alone or together, would not have been able to do that. There is also a sense that the weight you give to any of the three explanations is not particularly important. What counts is an openness to analyse all the different types of relationships within Northern Ireland including settler/colonised, Protestant/Catholic, British/Irish and class and sex (feminist and Marxist). All these alternative discourses must be heard. As Millar says: 'The causes of political polarisation are multi-dimensional. The overlapping yet distinct dimensions of cultural difference - religion, ethnicity, settler-native status, stereotypical notions of modernity and backwardness, national identity and allegiance - are compounded by structures of power and inequality'.³⁵ It is these structures of 'power and inequality' in Northern Ireland that are now to be examined.

³⁴ Brewer with Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland. 1600-1998 The Mote and the Beam*, p.210.

³⁵ David Millar, 'Colonialism and Academic Representations of the Troubles', p.65.

CHAPTER FOUR

A COLD HOUSE

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 In order to characterise theological approaches to the 'Troubles' of Northern Ireland, it is not enough to see the origins of the conflict as being religious, ethnic, or colonial or indeed any combination of these, but also to provide a picture of how those who lived in Northern Ireland were treated by the state in terms of justice and fairness. How this picture is viewed will allow a deeper engagement and analysis of theologies that responded to the 'Troubles'. The conflict beginning in 1968-69 did not emerge out of a vacuum. It was not simply the result of a few evil men and women on both sides wanting to fight with each other. Whether the strife was religious, colonial, or ethnic in origin there is no necessary reason that the 'Troubles' would have exploded if there was not a 'factory of grievances' igniting the touch paper of conflict.

4.1.2 In this chapter, there is an examination of the type and extent of the discrimination against the Roman Catholic minority in Northern Ireland under the Unionist regime until it was replaced by Direct Rule by Westminster in 1972. Then in the next chapter, there is an analysis of the situation post 1972 to compare and contrast but also to focus on the particular issue of human rights and security policy which provided a focus on Northern Ireland by the international community and Non Governmental Organisations concerned with human rights.

4.1.3 In 1998, the Ulster Unionist party leader David Trimble during his acceptance speech for the Nobel peace prize said: 'Ulster Unionists, fearful of being isolated on the island, built a solid house, but it was a cold house for Catholics. And northern Nationalists, although they had a roof over their heads, seemed to us if they meant to burn the house down.'¹ In contrast to this rather homely picture, Father Alex Reid in September 2005 at a public meeting compared the treatment of Northern Irish Roman

¹ D. McKittrick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles* (London: Penguin, 2001), p.6.

Catholics by their Protestant compatriots as being comparable to that received by South African blacks by the Apartheid regime in South Africa.² Whether the experience of a substantial minority of the people of Northern Ireland was one of slight discomfort in a cold house or that of a black person under Apartheid is a central question for political theology in Northern Ireland. It is this question that is addressed in this chapter.

4.2 An Informed Judgement

4.2.1 During the lifetime of the Stormont regime the question of how much the Unionist government discriminated against the Roman Catholic minority was very much a live topic.³ For Whyte, from the end of the 1960s interest in this particular topic has waned either because of the reforms brought in by the Unionist Government in response to the demands of the Civil Rights Movement and/or that after the 'Troubles' broke out political controversy focused on the violence and how it should be controlled and responded to. However, as Whyte points out, while interest in the topic has declined, the evidence that is needed to make an informed judgement about the issue has greatly increased.⁴ Without this 'informed judgement' then any theology of the 'Troubles' which is created is lacking in any empirical grounding.

4.3 Historical Background

4.3.1 New opportunities for Roman Catholics occurred through the 1950s. This can be attributed to both the effect of the Education Act of 1944, and post war economic diversification which lessened the stranglehold of the Protestant power bases of ship building and engineering. By the mid-1960s, a greatly strengthened Roman Catholic middle class was no longer content simply to serve its own community as Solicitors, Doctors, Shop Keepers, Teachers and Publicans as public employment was largely the preserve of the Protestant community. These 'New Nationalists' wanted to play a full

² [Http://www3.u.tv/newsroom/indepth.asp?id=65960&pt=n](http://www3.u.tv/newsroom/indepth.asp?id=65960&pt=n) (Accessed : 1st July 2008).

³ Whyte, John 'How Much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' [<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/discrimination/whyte.html>]. Modified 13th March 2002, p.2. (Accessed: 26th February 2004).

⁴ Whyte, 'How Much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.2.

part in the life of Northern Ireland including its politics, and also to modernise and liberalise traditional Nationalist politics.⁵ There was a frustration at the slow pace of change and the 'New Nationalists' began to form themselves into political pressure groups, the first of which was the Campaign for Social Justice which was formed in Dungannon in May 1963.⁶ These groups led to the formation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association on 29th January 1967.⁷ The objectives of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights association were:

1. To defend the basic freedoms of all citizens.
2. To protect the rights of the individual.
3. To highlight all possible abuses of power.
4. To demand guarantees for freedom of speech, assembly and association.
5. To inform the public of their lawful rights.⁸

4.3.2 It is important to note that there were no demands pertaining to the parameters of the state in Northern Ireland. The constitutional status of Northern Ireland was accepted as a given and the aim was to work within that state. Once violence actually broke out the conflict quickly moved from reform to revolution. However, by the summer of 1968, the leadership of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association had decided to promote public protests. These, and the reaction to them by the Protestant population and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, catapulted Northern Ireland to the attention of the world's media and the modern phase of the 'Troubles' was born.

4.3.3 Whyte in his paper which attempted to assess the extent of discrimination by the Unionist regime provides an examination of six contentious areas. This thesis follows Whyte's taxonomy and examines: electoral practices, public employment, private

⁵ 'New Nationalist' is my own nomenclature as I want to give an indication by name as to the impact they had on traditionalist nationalist politics and particularly on the existing Nationalist Party led by Eddie McAteer. For the 'New Nationalists' there was a belief that the Nationalist representatives had singularly failed to put the case for the minority. T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1997), p.127.

⁶ T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.127.

⁷ The initial steering committee had members from the Communist Party, the Ulster Liberal Party, the Northern Ireland Labour Party, the Republican Clubs, Belfast Trades Council, the Campaign for Social Justice, the Belfast Wolfe Tone Society, while the Chair of the Conservative and Unionist Association of Queen's University Belfast was co-opted onto the committee. It could be said that this was the broadest group to meet together to share common aims in the history of the Northern Ireland state.

⁸ T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.137.

employment, public housing, regional policy, and policing; adding to his material where needed.⁹ After this there is an assessment of the motivation for discrimination by the Unionist regime, which Whyte does not look at.

4.4 Electoral Practices

4.4.1 Whyte examines three main issues under the rubric of 'electoral practices': (a) That constituency boundaries for Northern Ireland parliamentary elections were gerrymandered; (b) That the local government franchise was unfairly weighted in favour of the Unionists; (c) That local government electoral boundaries were gerrymandered.¹⁰

4.4.2 (a) *Gerrymandering of Parliamentary Constituencies.*

After the first two parliamentary elections to the Northern Ireland House of Commons were held under proportional representation in 1929, PR was abolished.¹¹ This action was and is attacked as being unfair to the Roman Catholic minority. However, it was clear that the intention of the parliamentary draftsman was to make sure that the Nationalists did not lose any seats under the new arrangement. If the abolition of PR had any effect it was to fossilise Northern Irish politics, with uncontested elections becoming frequent, as a battle between monolithic Unionist and Nationalist parties.¹² For example, the constituency of South Antrim was so secure for the Unionists that the Unionist candidate was returned unopposed for nine consecutive elections. So in that constituency in Stormont elections there was no polling between 1929 and 1965. The real losers of the action of 1929 were the independent unionist, socialist and labour voices, as the abolition of PR weakened smaller parties, who had their seats

⁹ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.3.

¹⁰ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.3. Whyte also points out that if a truly comprehensive examination of electoral practices is to be undertaken then the franchise for parliamentary elections also needs to be looked at. There were complaints over votes for graduates of Queen's University and for owners of business premises. He says that 'this issue is rarely mentioned in the literature' and also these franchises were abolished in 1968 prior to the civil rights disturbances.

¹¹ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.4. There was a constituency for graduates of Queen's University, with four seats, and PR was retained only for this constituency.

¹² In the 1933 election the Unionist party won the election without a vote being cast as twenty-seven of the seats were uncontested by non-Unionists.

halved, from 1925 to 1929 even though their votes increased. The malign influence of the 1929 arrangement was thus on the body politic as a whole rather than a direct attack on the Nationalist community.

4.4.3 (b) *The Local Government Franchise.*

A more contentious electoral issue was that which was known as 'one man, one vote'. Lodgers, anyone living at home with their parents and sub-tenants could not vote in council elections so that around a quarter of Stormont voters had no say in local government elections.¹³ There was also a small number of property owners, around one and a half per cent of the electorate, who had more than one vote. This franchise pertained in all of the United Kingdom, but in the rest of the nation it was abolished in 1945 and kept in Northern Ireland. The Nationalist argument was that these franchises were kept so that the Nationalist vote would be reduced.

4.4.4 For Whyte, the claim that this was the case was 'palpably false'.¹⁴ A majority of those disenfranchised were Protestants though it is clear that Roman Catholics were over-represented among the disenfranchised. But what is clear is that the restriction of the franchise 'most affected the poorer sections of the population'.¹⁵ It is a moot point as to what effect the introduction of one man - one vote might have had. McKitterick cites an unpublished Unionist government study that concluded that Nationalists would have benefited significantly in Tyrone, Fermanagh and Londonderry city. He ventures the view that this would have led to a loss of Unionist party control over much of the west of the province, which would explain why Unionists were so strongly opposed to one man - one vote.¹⁶ In contrast a *Belfast Telegraph* investigation concluded that only one local authority - Armagh Urban District - would be lost to Unionist control by change in the franchise.¹⁷ The conclusion of Whyte is that:

¹³ My father had his first vote in local elections at thirty three years old when he moved out of my grandparents' house.

¹⁴ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.5.

¹⁵ D. McKittrick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.12.

¹⁶ D. McKittrick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.8.

¹⁷ White, Barry 'One Man, One Vote - Who Would Gain?', *Belfast Telegraph*, 30 January 1969.

On the whole, however, the nature of the local government franchise made only a slight difference to election results. Unionists held most local authorities by a majority so substantial that even if a change in the franchise cost them one or two seats, they would still retain control.¹⁸

The largest effect of the retention of archaic franchises by the Unionists was making the Nationalists a wonderful present of the slogan that was to echo around the world in 1968-1969 'one man, one vote'.¹⁹

4.4.5 (c) *Gerrymandering of Local Government Electoral Areas.*

For Nationalists at the time and with retrospective assessment of discrimination in electoral practices the main area of contention is the redrawing of electoral boundaries to give advantage to the Unionists. The Campaign for Social Justice said that there would be no point in changing the franchise unless there was an end to gerrymandering and votes would then count equally.²⁰

4.4.6 Even with the most favourable electoral system imaginable, it is clear that Nationalists would have been in power in only a minority of local authorities. The complaint is that even a large number of authorities which Nationalists would have been expected to control were gerrymandered out of their hands by the Unionists. 'As a result of the changes nationalists lost their majorities in thirteen of twenty-four councils they had originally controlled.'²¹

4.4.7 The clearest, and most famous, example of gerrymandering was in Londonderry, or Derry. Under Unionist rule Northern Ireland's second city shifted from Nationalist to Unionist rule even though there was a clear Nationalist majority. In 1929, the city had, on the parliamentary register, a Nationalist majority of 2,000. Control of the city was achieved by the Unionists dividing the city into five wards; three of the wards had Unionist majorities and the other two Nationalist majorities, with the Nationalist

¹⁸ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.5.

¹⁹ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.5.

²⁰ *Northern Ireland: the Plain Truth* The Campaign for Social Justice (Dungannon, 1969).

²¹ D. McKittrick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.8.

majorities being much larger than the Unionist. By the time it was refined in 1936 9,961 Nationalist electors returned 8 councillors, while 7,444 Unionist electors returned 12 councillors.²²

4.4.8 Were there any mitigating factors which could be advanced in defense of the gerrymandering? It does seem that some of the accusations of gerrymandering of cases outside Londonderry fail to take account of the higher proportion of children within the Nationalist population. In some cases, a Unionist council ruled over a population with a small Nationalist majority, which would obviously seem to be a case of gerrymandering. But when the proportions of adults who are of voting age are examined, then some of these majorities disappear. Hewitt even found two examples (Limavady and Ballycastle) where a Nationalist council ruled in spite of an electoral majority of Unionists.²³

4.4.9 The main defence used by the Unionists was that when local government electoral boundaries were redrawn, they were done so not simply on the basis of population but on the basis of rateable value. So, they said that those who paid the most rates were entitled to a larger say in the conduct of local government. Unionists were generally richer than Nationalists (why this was the case was never questioned?) And therefore should have more representation. As Whyte says this is a 'dubious defence.'

Democratic theory does not in general permit that the rich should be more strongly represented than the poor...If electoral boundaries were drawn so as to over-represent the rich, this was not a refutation of the charge of gerrymandering: it was a description of how the gerrymandering was achieved.²⁴

Indeed, even if the Unionist premise is accepted, as time went on local government finance largely came from central government and not from local ratepayers. In fact, by 1969, only a quarter was provided from local sources. That the Protestant

²² T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.113.

²³ Hewitt, Christopher 'Catholic Grievances, Catholic Nationalism and Violence in Northern Ireland during the Civil Rights Period: a Reconsideration', *British Journal of Sociology*, (1981) Vol.32, No. 3, pp.362-80

²⁴ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.7.

Churches happily acquiesced in this obvious 'bias towards the rich' is quite astounding.

4.4.10 Whyte's conclusion is damning. Of the three areas we examined of electoral practice it is the gerrymandering of electoral boundaries which provides an unanswerable case of bias against the Nationalist population. 'Nationalists were manipulated out of control in a number of councils where they had a majority of electors. This is one of the clearest areas of discrimination in the whole field of controversy.'²⁵ However, while Whyte rightly gives greater weight to gerrymandering in local councils as the major source of electoral discrimination, both the abolition of PR and the limiting of the franchise should be seen as integral parts of the calculations which were necessary for gerrymandering to work effectively.

4.4.11 The discoveries in 1979 in official papers, made by Whyte and others, make it clear that the 'Derry redistribution' of 1936 and reorganisation in other contentious areas were designed by the Stormont Government and particularly the Ministry of Home Affairs. These were not ad hoc local arrangements but deliberate measures taken by central Government to discriminate against the entire Nationalist population of Northern Ireland.²⁶

4.5 Public Employment

4.5.1 Speaking about employment patterns in all areas of the public sector (except the police) for Whyte a consistent pattern emerges.

At manual labour levels, Catholics generally received their proportionate share of public employment. But at any level above that, they were seriously under-represented, and the higher one went, the greater the shortfall.²⁷

²⁵ Whyte, John 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.7.

²⁶ Whyte, John 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.7.

²⁷ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.9.

Even at the lowest level of public employment life was not easy for Roman Catholics. J.M. Andrews the Minister of Labour, and later Prime Minister, responding to the Orange Order claiming that the Stormont Government discriminated in favour of Roman Catholics, stated in 1933:

Another allegation made against the Government and which was untrue, was that, of 31 porters at Stormont, 28 were Roman Catholics. I have investigated the matter, and I find that there are 30 Protestants, and only one Roman Catholic there temporarily.²⁸

Examining material that only became available in the late 1970s from Government records of the early years of the Stormont regime, there is even the case of a Roman Catholic gardener working at Stormont who was dismissed due to Orange Order pressure, even though he had an exemplary record in the British Army and a personal reference from the Prince of Wales.²⁹

4.5.2 It is clear that from the early days of the Unionist regime that there was systematic discrimination against well qualified Roman Catholics in the Civil Service. Bates refused to allow any Roman Catholic appointments to the Ministry of Home Affairs in the 1920s. While Andrews, in 1926, having found two 'Free Staters' (Roman Catholics), in his ministry tightened regulations so that such people would not be appointed again. One may contend that some justification for these policies may at least be understandable because of the sense of siege that was very real for Unionists in the 1920s. Indeed the penetration of the Civil Service in Dublin Castle during the Anglo- Irish war in order to undermine the Crown provided a fresh memory and a lesson Unionists were determined to learn by making sure anyone in the pay of the Government was going to be loyal to the Government. Of course, the only way to really ensure that was to employ Protestants as much as possible.

4.5.3 Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister, James Craig, was able to take this sense of siege and to make a permanent feature of Unionism what McKitterick calls 'the

²⁸ Quoted in Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.12.

²⁹ Quoted in Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.12.

politics of permanent confrontation'.³⁰ So no matter what the extraneous factors the siege mentality continued to provide justification for discrimination, even though the exceptional circumstances of the 1920s had disappeared.

- 4.5.4 A 1943 survey established that there were no Roman Catholics in the most senior 55 jobs in the Civil Service. Even if one looks at the 600 middle ranking posts, there are only 37 Roman Catholics.³¹ As McKitterick concludes, 'The picture was similar in most local authorities and other parts of the of the public sector, with only occasional exceptions.'³² Terence O'Neill spoke of how there was a campaign against him in the cabinet during the fifties because it was thought he was encouraging Roman Catholics to join the Civil Service.³³ The census of 1971 showed that of 1,383 senior government officials, 11 per cent reported themselves as Roman Catholic. This is in contrast to the 31.4 per cent who declared themselves as Roman Catholic in the population as a whole. Even after sixty years Roman Catholics were still seriously underrepresented in the higher echelons of public life in Northern Ireland.³⁴
- 4.5.5 Again, were there any other mitigating factors for the discrimination? One reason given was that Roman Catholics were underrepresented because of their lower educational standards. Three quarters of the grammar school and university population was Protestant, so it is not unreasonable to expect that there would be a greater proportion of Protestants who were holders of higher posts. This begs the question as to the structure of a society where 75 per cent of the grammar school and university population are from one particular Christian tradition. Even leaving that aside, the proportion of Protestants holding higher posts was even beyond the above educational disparities.
- 4.5.6 Another reason given is that Roman Catholics were both unwilling to serve and were discouraged by their co-religionists to be part of the apparatus of what they considered to be an illegitimate state. The Roman Catholic civil servant Patrick Shea, who was

³⁰ D. McKitterick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.9.

³¹ D. McKitterick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.11.

³² D. McKitterick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.11.

³³ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.13.

³⁴ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.9.

told he would not be promoted simply because he was a Roman Catholic, spoke of how he and other Roman Catholic civil servants were viewed by suspicion by other Roman Catholics, because 'we had joined the enemy; we were lost souls.'³⁵ While the southern journalist Desmond Fennell told of how upset a prominent northern Nationalist friend was that a Roman Catholic had been made a judge of the Supreme Court, because it was good to be able to say that there were no Roman Catholic judges on the Supreme Court!³⁶

4.5.7 It could also be said that some local authorities controlled by Roman Catholic majorities pursued policies which were exactly the same as their Protestant counterparts. Famously, Newry Urban District Council employed almost no Protestants. Indeed, Nationalists from Newry did not even bother to challenge Unionist assertions that they discriminated against Protestants in terms of appointments in local government. In 1958, the Unionists pointed out that Newry Urban District Council had ninety full-time staff all of whom were Roman Catholics. However, while imitation might be the sincerest form of flattery, analogous abuses do not excuse the amount of discrimination that took place in the greater number of councils controlled by Protestants with Roman Catholics controlling only eleven out of seventy three local authorities in 1958.³⁷

4.5.8 Hennessey concurs with Whyte that, 'even when taking account of these factors, it seems evident that some discrimination did occur.'³⁸ Whyte concludes his section with an order of demerit for discrimination in public service. The most discriminatory were 'Local authorities in the area of precarious unionist control west of the Bann', the 'other local authorities', followed by the 'Northern Ireland civil service' and then the 'Westminster civil service'.³⁹

³⁵ P. Shea, *Voices and the Sound of Drums: an Irish Autobiography* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1981), p.113.

³⁶ T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.133.

³⁷ T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.113.

³⁸ T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.113.

³⁹ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.13.

4.6 Private Employment

4.6.1 The policy of discrimination towards Roman Catholics in public employment was also apparent in private employment. In 1932, Sir Basil Brooke (later Unionist Prime Minister) famously told an audience of Orangemen:

There was a great number of Protestants and Orangemen who employed Roman Catholics. He felt he could speak freely on this subject as he had not a Roman Catholic about his own place. He appreciated the great difficulty experienced by some of them in procuring suitable Protestant labour but he would point out that Roman Catholics were endeavouring to get in everywhere. He would appeal to Loyalists therefore, wherever possible, to employ Protestant lads and lassies.⁴⁰

4.6.2 In the private sector in Northern Ireland it was common to find workforces and industries which were more than 90 per cent Protestant. Apart from occupations which were needed to service their own community (such as Doctors and Solicitors) the main occupation in which Roman Catholics were dominant was the drinks trade which was seen as being a lower class occupation. The heavy industries which dominated the Northern Irish economy under Stormont rule, such as shipyards and heavy engineering, employed few Roman Catholics. Indeed, in Harland & Woolf there was also periodic expulsions in times of crisis of the few Roman Catholics who worked there.⁴¹ The perpetrators were not the labour aristocrats, the skilled workers. Protestant rivet-heaters, unskilled workers who assisted riveters, were largely responsible for industrial expulsions. It seems that the expulsions occurred in the Shipyards rather than other industries because Sir Edward Harland was much more indulgent in terms of Loyalist autonomy in the shipyard. Whereas, in places like Ewart's Mill, Roman Catholics were promised protection when intimidated and if they left their jobs were kept for them.

⁴⁰ M.Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto, 1976), p.90.

⁴¹ It was not just the Roman Catholics who were expelled but also those termed 'rotten Protestants' i.e. socialists and trade unionists. A. Boyd, *Holy War in Belfast* (Tralee: Anvil, 1969), ps.161, 174-5 points out that such expulsions occurred in 1886, 1893, 1898, 1912 and 1920.

- 4.6.3 Austen Morgan, in his study of the Belfast working class in the period leading up to partition, states that ‘Belfast had a unique pattern of industrial action, that of working class cooperation being marred by ethnic conflict.’ So while the intra-working class conflict (between Roman Catholics and Protestants) is the one which sits largest in both popular memory and academic accounts, Morgan concludes that ‘Inter-class conflict in the mills, factories, yards and works has a much greater social weight in Belfast’s history.’⁴² However, Whyte is correct in his analysis of the effect of the expulsions, ‘it would not be surprising if for many decades Catholics were wary of applying for jobs in the yard, even had recruitment processes been completely impartial.’⁴³
- 4.6.4 Barritt and Carter demonstrated how little things had changed with their study written at the beginning of the 1960s. They provided a number of examples of Protestant firms discriminating against Roman Catholics and prominent Unionists boasting about discrimination they had fostered. It was also the case that they found several Roman Catholic firms which discriminated against Protestants. But, like our example of Newry Council in public employment it seems to be a case of the ‘exception proving the rule’ with such Protestant domination in business that even with a scenario where Roman Catholics discriminated equally, or even more than Protestants, the Roman Catholics would still be greatly disadvantaged.⁴⁴
- 4.6.5 The last major study done of the population of Northern Ireland before Stormont was abolished in 1972 was the census of 1971. Examining the material from the census in 1975 Aunger found that there were three main ways in which Roman Catholics were disadvantaged.⁴⁵ 1) they were more likely than Protestants to be lower down the socio-economic scale. 2) within each class there was a preponderance of Roman Catholics at the bottom of the class. 3) Roman Catholics were more likely to be found

⁴² A. Morgan, *Labour and Partition - The Belfast Working Class 1905-23* (London: Pluto, 1991), p.6. Morgan points out that in the 26 years after 1888 that the ‘strike profile’ of Belfast is very similar to that of other British cities in terms of number of strikes and when they occurred. There were 174 strikes in this period with a peak in the 1890s, a trough between 1899-1907, and a wave of strikes between 1910-14.

⁴³ Whyte, ‘How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?’ p.16.

⁴⁴ D.Barritt and C.Carter, *The Northern Ireland Problem: A Study in Group Relations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 100-105.

⁴⁵ Edmund A. Aunger, ‘Religion and occupational class in Northern Ireland’, *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (1975), pp. 1-18.

in industries with lower status and more unemployment, for example, construction. On the other hand Protestants tended to be found in industries such as engineering, which had both higher prestige and pay. The combination of these three factors meant that the greatest gap between Protestants and Roman Catholics, economically, was to be seen in unemployment rates. The 1971 census showed that Roman Catholic males were 2.6 times more likely to be unemployed than Protestant males. Whyte's conclusion was that, 'Though none of these disadvantages by itself was marked, their cumulative effect was substantial.'⁴⁶

- 4.6.6 Whyte analyses five reasons, apart from any discrimination, which have been put forward to account for the disadvantages Roman Catholics faced. They are: differences in attitude to work; differences in educational attainment; inadequate knowledge of job opportunities; the concentration of Roman Catholics in peripheral areas; and the larger average size of Roman Catholic families.
- 4.6.7 The last three reasons have been the focus of debate on fair employment post-Stormont and will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter. While education has already been examined as a factor for a lack of good jobs in terms of the public sector in Northern Ireland; it is difficult to take too seriously the pervasive view among Protestants that Roman Catholics are both lazy and/or do not work because they wish to undermine the state. Here, we see the very close relationship between sectarianism and racism. Whyte concludes very temperately 'that there is no good evidence that differences in attitude to work are an important cause of the differences in Catholic and Protestant economic status.'⁴⁷

4.7 Public Housing

- 4.7.1 Housing is an emotive issue in the history of Northern Ireland. The allocation of a house at Caledon in June 1968 in Dungannon to a nineteen year old, unmarried, Protestant woman who happened to be the secretary of a solicitor who was a Unionist parliamentary candidate and local councillor, has been suggested to be 'the start of the

⁴⁶ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.14.

⁴⁷ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.14.

troubles, or at least as the spark that ignited the bonfire.’⁴⁸ She was given the house over the heads of two Roman Catholic families who had squatted in the district. Other Roman Catholic families in the area had been denied houses while the councillor had opposed the building of houses for Roman Catholics in the area of Dungannon. A young Nationalist MP Austin Currie squatted in the house, for a few hours, and was removed by the RUC. The situation pushed housing to the top of the civil rights agenda causing both demonstrations and counter demonstrations leading to the violence known as the ‘Troubles’.

4.7.2 The appalling state of Northern Ireland’s housing stock was shown by a report commissioned by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1943 that found that 70 per cent of existing houses needed repairs and the minimum number of new houses required was 100,000. This figure was to be doubled if overcrowding was to be eliminated and slums cleared.⁴⁹ This situation was something which affected the poor no matter what their religion.⁵⁰ There were little or no allegations of discriminations about public housing because the amount of public housing was minuscule. This all changed in 1945 when for the first time large amounts of public housing were built. In terms of discrimination in housing becoming a live issue then it is only begins to surface in the 1950s.⁵¹

4.7.3 In Northern Ireland there were two different sources of public housing: the local authorities and the Northern Ireland Housing Trust. In terms of the Housing Trust, Whyte concludes that it ‘has generally been exonerated of all conscious desire to discriminate.’⁵² In a geographical sense it concentrated its properties around Belfast, which is the most Protestant area of Northern Ireland, while it selected tenants purely on their ability to pay and not on need, which of course then discriminated indirectly against Roman Catholics.

⁴⁸ D. McKittrick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.40.

⁴⁹ T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.96.

⁵⁰ Whyte, ‘How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?’ p.17.

⁵¹ The first complaint Whyte identifies is from Omagh in 1950 and after that complaints begin to multiply. Whyte, ‘How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?’ p.17.

⁵² Whyte, ‘How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?’ p.17.

4.7.4 It was to the door of the other provider of public housing, local councils, that the most serious charges of discrimination were laid. Again we note that similar charges were made against both Unionist and Nationalist councils, but there were so few Nationalist councils that they could not make up the balance by their own injustices. The Cameron report of 1969 summed up the injustices as being the withholding or delaying of planning permission where they thought a housing project would be to their electoral disadvantage and the principal criterion in allocating houses was not need 'but maintenance of the current political preponderance in the local government area.'⁵³

4.7.5 This approach was made clear in 1963 by the Unionist chairman of Eniskillen housing committee:

The council will decide what wards the houses are to be built in. We are not going to build houses in the South ward and cut a rod to beat ourselves later on. We are going to see that the right people are put in these houses, and we are not going to apologise for it. ⁵⁴

4.7.6 Housing policy in certain areas like Fermanagh and Dungannon was manifestly unfair against Roman Catholics. However, while discrimination clearly took place, what was the extent of it? In his analysis of the Cameron Commission and the secondary literature, Whyte posits the view that the above allegations 'concern without exception areas west of the Bann, and not even all of those.'⁵⁵ Even the districts which did come under criticism, the case was often not that Roman Catholics were refused houses but that they were not allowed to move out of wards where they were in a majority so that what the unionists considered to be the 'electoral balance' would be maintained. He says very clearly that there are no complaints against the majority of councils in Northern Ireland. While in Belfast, which is the largest local authority by a long way, there are complaints about the poor quality of houses but not about to

⁵³ Cameron Report, 1969, *Disturbances in Northern Ireland: Report of the Commission appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland* (Belfast: HMSO, Cmd 532), para.140.

⁵⁴ D. McKittrick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.13.

⁵⁵ Whyte, 'How Much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.18.

whom the bad houses were given.⁵⁶ Richard Rose came to the conclusion that the only evidence he came across of bias against Roman Catholics was when he looked at family size; for families with six or more children (and they were a very small proportion of the total) there was a 12 percent difference against Roman Catholics who had been assigned public housing.⁵⁷

4.7.7 Both sides are wrong in their view of discrimination in housing. The Unionists claim that no discrimination took place, while for the Nationalists it was totally pervasive and sanctioned by the State. The real picture is that there was some discrimination and it was local in nature. Actually, in terms of housing the victims have been the poor of both communities throughout Northern Ireland. As Whyte says, 'Overall, discrimination seems to have been less widespread in housing than in, say, public employment.'⁵⁸ On 22nd November 1968, in response to British pressure, the Unionist Government issued a five-point reform programme. One of the points was a new points for the allocation of houses by local authorities. Thus, at least one of the running sores between the communities in Northern Ireland was ended. But it is no coincidence that some of the areas which were to feature prominently in the 'Troubles', such as north and west Belfast and Londonderry city, were among those where poor housing and high unemployment existed and persisted.

4.8 Regional Development

4.8.1 The complaint in terms of regional development was that the Unionist government concentrated on developing the east of the province and neglected the west, though the west was the area which needed the greatest development. In the west Roman Catholics had a small majority while the east was in the main Protestant and so the feeling was that it was sectarian decision of government to favour the east. Darby gives a list of all the contentious decisions:

⁵⁶ Whyte, 'How Much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.18.

⁵⁷ R. Rose, *Governing without Consensus: an Irish Perspective* (London: Faber, 1962), pp.293-294.

⁵⁸ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.19.

- 1945-51 Seventy-seven firms were established in the province with government support before the first came to Derry in 1951.
- 1963 The Benson report on railways led to the removal of the west's only railway line, and cut Derry off from Strabane, Omagh and Dungannon.
- 1964 The Matthew report sited Northern Ireland 'new town' at Craigavon, further attracting population to the east.
- 1965 The anti-submarine training school in Derry was closed, adding 600 to an unemployment figure already approaching 20 per cent.
- 1965 The Lockwood report rejected Derry's claim for Northern Ireland's second university despite the existence of a University College in the city. It was awarded to Coleraine, whose 12,000 population was less than a quarter the size of Derry's.
- 1965 The Wilson plan, which designated growth areas for Northern Ireland, concentrated them heavily in the east.
- 1966 Derry's naval base, another major source of employment, was closed.⁵⁹

4.8.2 Both Hennessey and Whyte point out that each of the above decisions could be justified individually.⁶⁰ Unionist politicians and government civil servants have vehemently denied that there was any discrimination towards the west. It was simply the case that docks, communications and labour were centred in the east and that was where entrepreneurs wanted to settle. Through the sixties the lot of the west improved considerably and as an issue regional development need not engender the same

⁵⁹ J. Darby, *Conflict in Northern Ireland: the Development of a Polarised Community* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1976), p.67.

⁶⁰ T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.131; Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.19.

amount of heat as some of the other issues we have touched upon.⁶¹ But, again it was another issue where the accusations of discrimination were not as severe when it was something that was the purview of the central government in Stormont as opposed to local authorities.

4.9 Police

4.9.1 Both regional development and housing emerged relatively late as grievances. In contrast policing was one of the first issues that concerned the Nationalist community after the foundation of the Northern Irish state. It then declined in importance as things became relatively stable and then emerged as an important issue at the beginning of the 'Troubles'. The question of policing merges with the wider security issues of the 'Troubles' and this is an important part of the next chapter.

4.9.2 Again Whyte asks us to focus on what the allegations in relation to policing actually are. None of the Nationalist writers are saying that Northern Ireland was a police state but rather that 'policing was carried out in a one-sided and unfair manner.'⁶² Whyte focuses his analysis on the complaints about policing under three headings:

(a) the police forces (Royal Ulster Constabulary and Ulster Special Constabulary) were sectarian in composition and outlook; (b) government and police were given excessive powers by special legislation; and (c) with the aid of these powers they oppressed, not just violent opponents of the regime, but the nationalist and Catholic population in general.⁶³

Whyte's schema is a good one, though there is a need under (b) to add and stress the symbiotic relationship between the police and the government.

⁶¹ J. Darby, *Conflict in Northern Ireland: the Development of a Polarised Community*, p.68.

⁶² Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.21.

⁶³ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.21.

4.9.3 (a) *the police forces (Royal Ulster Constabulary and Ulster Special Constabulary) were sectarian in composition and outlook.*

It was proposed by a government committee in 1922 that one third of the places in the new RUC be kept for Roman Catholics. Sadly, this ideal of a religiously integrated force was never realised. Indeed the numbers of Roman Catholics in the RUC continued to decline over the year from 17 per cent in 1936 to 11 per cent in 1969. It did seem that those Roman Catholics who joined the RUC were not discriminated against within the force. In fact, the percentage of Roman Catholics in the higher ranks of the RUC was higher than their proportion in the force as a whole. The heavily armed auxiliary force, the Ulster Special Constabulary, later known more often as the B Specials, was exclusively Protestant. In the context of Northern Ireland the overwhelmingly Protestant nature of the police forces must have impacted on the ethos of policing and attempts to be seen as being even handed between Roman Catholics and Protestants.⁶⁴ We will see that this is an ongoing problem throughout the 'Troubles' 'that the two communities were not policed with equal respect' because of ' 'cultural' ties between loyalism and the security forces.'⁶⁵

4.9.4 (b) *government and police were given excessive powers by special legislation.*

In 1922, the Northern Ireland parliament passed the first of the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Acts which remained in force, in one form or another, until the abolition of Stormont.⁶⁶ The Special Powers Act, was a sweeping piece of legislation which allowed internment without trial, unlimited search powers, arrests without warrant, and bans on meetings and publications, as well as providing far-reaching catch-all clauses. Section 2 (4) stated:

If any person does any act of such a nature as to be calculated to be prejudicial to the preservation of the peace or maintenance of order in Northern Ireland

⁶⁴ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.21.

⁶⁵ P. Larkin, *A Very British Jihad - Collusion, Conspiracy and Cover-up in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2004), p.1.

⁶⁶ In a sense the last fling of the Special Powers Act was the introduction of Internment without trial on 9th August 1971. Its successors, 'The Emergency Provisions Act' and the 'Prevention of Terrorism Act', will be mentioned in the next chapter.

and not specifically provided for in the regulations he shall be deemed guilty of an offense against the regulations.⁶⁷

Famously, or rather infamously, in 1963 Mr B. Johannes Vorster the Minister for Justice of Apartheid South Africa said that he would swap all the powers he had for 'one clause of the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act'.⁶⁸ In mitigation most of the provisions of the Act were used sparingly. The government of the Republic took for themselves similar powers against the IRA and there is no doubt used them even more harshly. In the south of the country executions were carried out under the legislation though not in the north. When the Act was passed in 1922 Northern Ireland was in a state of a civil war with tit for tat sectarian killings being the order of the day. With 'the politics of permanent confrontation' fostered by Unionism the Act remained in place whether there was an active IRA campaign or not.⁶⁹ Whyte quotes one Unionist academic who said, 'the Act may be claimed to have gone further than was strictly necessary even at the height of the troubles'.⁷⁰

4.9.5 Two areas which Whyte does not mention are the paramilitary nature of the police in Northern Ireland and the political relationship between the police and judiciary. RUC officers carried revolvers and sometimes heavier weaponry, while the armament of the B Specials included handguns, rifles and submachine guns. The large number of police and B Specials brought Roman Catholic complaints that policing had a military character and thus produced an intimidating effect. As well as that, the police had no real operational independence. In Northern Ireland senior police officers sometimes attended cabinet meeting and they responded directly to directions from ministers. As McKittrick says, 'The political, legal and policing worlds were thus inextricably linked: one community governed, judged and policed the other.'⁷¹ So,

⁶⁷ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.22.

⁶⁸ M. Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto, 1976), pp.93-94.

⁶⁹ There were subsequent IRA campaigns in 1939-43 and 1954-62.

⁷⁰ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.22.

⁷¹ D. McKittrick and D.McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.11. Further 'The control that the Unionist party had extended to the fields of justice and law and order. Judges and magistrates were almost all Protestants, many of them associated with the Unionist party. Between 1937 and 1968 for example, thirteen sitting Unionist MPs were appointed judges, moving effortlessly from making laws to administering them.'

the police forces not only maintained law and order but also provided jobs for Protestants and were well named as the armed wing of unionism.

4.9.6 (c) *with the aid of these powers they oppressed, not just violent opponents of the regime, but the nationalist and Catholic population in general.*

Whyte says that this was the most difficult part of his paper to write in terms of the epistemological gap in the literature. 'The gap in perceptions is as great here as anywhere.'⁷² In contrast to the other areas he examines, he finds a paucity of what he sees as researchers in the middle.⁷³ We will see that this is important for theology when we come to look at all the issues surrounding security and human rights as the Churches and theologians almost singularly neglected making any value judgements on this particular cluster of issues.

4.9.7 The two main reports on the Special Powers Act came to contrasting conclusions. The National Council for Civil Liberties reported in 1935. The conclusion of their report was that the special powers given to the police were not just used on those who opposed the state violently, but also those who were against the government non-violently both left wing and nationalist.⁷⁴ Edwards looked at how the Act operated between the years 1945-55. His conclusion was that there was some 'undesirable' features of the way the Act was used but that 'the overall paucity of prosecutions in recent years points unmistakably to the policy of toleration on the part of the Northern Ireland Government.'⁷⁵ Edwards was looking at a relatively quiet period in the history of the province, there was no current IRA campaign, with a number of regulations being repealed between 1949-51 but broadly it did seem that the Act was used in a more restrained way post Second World War.⁷⁶

⁷² Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.23.

⁷³ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.23.

⁷⁴ *Report of a Commission of Inquiry appointed to examine the purpose and effect of the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Acts (Northern Ireland), 1922 & 1933* (London: National Council for Civil Liberties, 1936 reprinted 1972).

⁷⁵ Edwards, J.L.I. J. 'Special powers in Northern Ireland', *Criminal Law Review*, 1956, p.17.

⁷⁶ Whyte, 'How much discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.24.

- 4.9.8 Clearly, the Act was used disproportionately against the Roman Catholic population. In 1966 when the Protestant organisation the Ulster Volunteer Force was banned which was the first time the Act was used to ban a non-Nationalist organisation. The next chapter will point out a continuing difficulty for the Security Forces was how they were to relate to pro-state organisations who break the law in pursuit of their ends.
- 4.9.9 In terms of the Police forces attitude to the Roman Catholic population Whyte laments that the amount of serious evidence dwindles to almost nothing for the period 1922-1968.⁷⁷ The Cameron Commission of 1969 and the Scarman report of 1972 both examined the behaviour of the Police forces during the disturbances of 1968 and 1969. Both reports found a mixed bag. On the one hand it was reported by the Cameron Commission that the RUC acted with 'discipline and restraint.' However, it was reported by Scarman that there a concern within the majority of the RUC that they should do their duty.⁷⁸ On the other hand, Cameron reported that a number of policemen were involved in assault, battery and the use of sectarian slogans. And Scarman found six occasions when the police were seriously at fault with the B Specials especially showing a lack of discipline especially concerning the use of firearms.⁷⁹
- 4.9.10 For Whyte it is possible to project backwards for a certain amount of time as many of the police officers had served for the previous ten or indeed twenty years and so he concludes:⁸⁰

The police force could not be seen to be consistently impartial, applying the law evenly to everyone, unionist and anti-unionist alike. On the other hand, they could not be seen as purely partisan, designed to perpetuate unionist ascendancy and batter into the ground all political opponents.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.25.

⁷⁸ Cameron para.168, Scarman paras 3.2 and 3.3.

⁷⁹ Cameron para.177, Scarman para. 3.7 and 3.23.

⁸⁰ Though if there was any change in Nationalist attitudes towards the police they seem to have softened during the 60s with 1968-69 reversing a trend.

⁸¹ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.25.

He sees the record of the police as hovering somewhere between partiality and impartiality.

4.10 Order of Demerit

4.10.1 Whyte finishes his paper with an order of demerit in terms of the six contentious areas we have examined. Those with the greatest amounts of discrimination come first:

Electoral practices

Public employment

Policing

Private employment

Public housing

Regional policy⁸²

So, Northern Ireland was at least a cold and unwelcoming house for the Roman Catholic population because of the discrimination that took place. Was there any justification for the discrimination? It depends on how far the discrimination is seen as being formented by the Unionist leadership for selfish political ends, or how far it was an understandable response to persistent disloyalty and how many Roman Catholics withheld all but a *de facto* recognition of the state.

4.11 A Note on the Churches

4.11.1 What then was the reaction of the Christian Churches to this discrimination? Dunlop speaking about growing up in Northern Ireland commented, 'it was a place where everyone looked after their own and no one looked after everybody.'⁸³ That attitude meant that it was difficult for Churches 'to provide the prophetic, critical and visionary insight' Dunlop argued was needed in Northern Ireland. The failure of this was bad both for politics and the Church. If the response of the Churches is to 'provide an uncritical chaplaincy service to political ideologies' this gives the

⁸² Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?'p.26.

⁸³ Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging*, p.77.

ideologies a 'quasi-religious character', with the result that any need to compromise is seen as betraying religious principles.⁸⁴

4.11.2 Being on the receiving end of the discrimination, the Roman Catholic Church did at times speak out about what was happening to their people. But, as their community was being discriminated against and there was within parts of Irish Roman Catholicism an ethic of resistance to the state, that they spoke out is not perhaps unexpected. On the Protestant side the response was lamentable. Writing about the Methodist Church, McMaster comments:

When Ireland was partitioned in 1921, the Methodist Conference made no politically related statement from then until 1963. For 42 years Methodists remained silent as the Protestant Parliament for the Protestant people took root and consolidated Protestant dominance in Northern Ireland. The silence has often been perceived as neutrality, but that is delusion. Churches and theology are never politically neutral. Silence is always support for the status quo. For most of the Stormont Parliament's life, we had nothing critical to say.⁸⁵

4.11.3 A report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1967 called for a points system for the allocation of housing, fair employment including promotion of people in jobs purely on merit.⁸⁶ Dunlop quotes a 1993 report from the General Assembly which states that 'The Presbyterian Church shares the guilt of the majority community in Northern Ireland for tolerating the practice of discrimination in jobs, housing and voting rights which largely led to the Civil Rights Campaign of the 1960s.'⁸⁷ On 6th February 2008 the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Rev Roy Cooper speaking at the National Liberal Club in London spoke of how Protestant Churches in Northern Ireland during the 'Troubles' ignored injustices perpetrated against the Roman Catholic Community. "The Protestant Churches must

⁸⁴ Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging*, p.62.

⁸⁵ Johnston McMaster, 'Lecture Four', in *Brokenness, Forgiveness, Healing and Peace in Ireland: What Should the Churches do?* (Lectures at St. Anne's; Belfast: St. Anne's Cathedral, 1996), p.34.

⁸⁶ General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Annual Reports, 1967.

⁸⁷ General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Annual Reports, 1993, p.14. Quoted in Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging*, p.57.

take responsibility for their reluctance in the past to actively encourage equality and justice for all.”⁸⁸ As Lennon states:

In Protestant churches, the silence that had gone on for years about injustices committed against Catholics, and the failure to critique the state, came home to roost at the time of the civil rights movement.⁸⁹

4.11.4 In terms of the issue of discrimination the example of Eric Gallagher is instructive. A Methodist Minister, he co-authored with Stanley Worrall the first substantial theological study of the troubles, arguing that the ‘Irish question’ was the ‘ultimate challenge to Christianity’.⁹⁰ He was known for his work in building bridges between the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities and his passion for social justice. He was a member of the Faith and Politics Group, one of the authors of *Breaking Down the Enmity* and a member of the Opsahl Commission of 1993.⁹¹ In a conversation with me in the early 1990s he said that he only really became aware of the issue of discrimination against Roman Catholics in the 1960s. For a man so committed to both social justice and community relations, it does seem incredible that no connection between discrimination against Roman Catholics and social justice was made.⁹²

4.11.5 Since my conversation with Eric Gallagher and in 1996 reading Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* I have been intrigued by the question as to how much ordinary Protestants and their Churches knew about the discrimination what went on under their noses. Goldhagen demolishes the argument that the mass of Germans were opposed to the persecution of the Jews and that the killers did so reluctantly. His thesis was that the Holocaust was enthusiastically welcomed by tens of thousands of

⁸⁸ *Tablet*, 16 February 2008 and <http://www.irishmethodist.org/news/press.htm> (Accessed: 20 February 2008).

⁸⁹ Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.23.

⁹⁰ Eric Gallagher and Stanley Worrall, *Christians in Ulster - 1968-1980* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), p.205.

⁹¹ *A Citizen’s Inquiry: The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland*, ed., Andy Pollak, (Dublin 1993).

⁹² Denis Cooke, *Peacemaker: The Life and Work of Eric Gallagher* (Peterborough: MPH, 2005). In a telephone conversation with Denis Cooke on 23rd February 2008 he confirmed to me that the above view of Eric Gallagher not being aware of discrimination until the 1960s was correct.

ordinary Germans. These Germans were part of a society which saw Jews as evil and dangerous and so what they were doing was following their beliefs to their logical conclusion; the Holocaust.⁹³ Then in 1945 these same people became enthusiastic democrats.

4.11.6 John De Gruchy cites the comment of many black people in South Africa that, 'there are very few whites today who supported apartheid! How apartheid was sustained through the years boggles the mind.'⁹⁴ Appropriating the term from the history of the Holocaust, De Gruchy speaks of 'beneficiaries, who were also invariably bystanders' and how the crimes that they were responsible for were those of 'inaction, indifference and insensitivity'.⁹⁵ There is no doubt that the Protestant community in Northern Ireland and by extension the Protestant Churches were 'beneficiaries' of the discrimination in terms of jobs, housing and how they were treated and valued by the institutions of the state. For Protestant Churches and people because they were beneficiaries of the political arrangements they were largely bystanders when it came to any question of justice or redress and up to the explosion of violence in 1969, with the crimes cited above of 'inaction, indifference and insensitivity' being the order of the day in Northern Ireland.

4.11.7 Dunlop has pointed out how even the Roman Catholic complaints about discrimination that filtered through to Protestants were seen 'as the expression of a carefully nurtured sense of grievance' that either were exaggerated or did not exist in the first place.⁹⁶ This blind spot in the Protestant community in terms of the way their Roman Catholic neighbours were treated has led to a nostalgia about the pre-troubles days. It is a theme that McKay finds running through her interviews with many Protestants 'This terrible hatred has only come from 1969 when this trouble started. Before that, it was great.'⁹⁷ Thus the conflict is about the 'men of violence' and nothing else. This is largely the explanation that the Church bought into as well.

⁹³ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Abacus, 1996).

⁹⁴ J.W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (London: SCM, 2002), p.156.

⁹⁵ De Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*, p.156.

⁹⁶ Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging*, p.54.

⁹⁷ S.Mckay, *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2000), p.130.

4.12 Conclusion

4.12.1 Having compared Northern Ireland to both Nazi Germany and Apartheid South Africa it may seem that the conclusion of this chapter is to side with Reid and against Trimble. But the evidence leads us to say that Northern Ireland under Unionism was not Nazi Germany, Apartheid South Africa, or indeed comparable to a number of other countries who had difficult minorities to deal with. Roman Catholics were free to worship and to run their hospitals and schools,⁹⁸ were not deported to the south, actively persecuted or, apart from a few over a short period of time, interned without trial (in contrast to Southern Ireland which used detention without trial much more frequently) and Nationalist newspapers were free to criticise the government without fear of censure or censorship.

4.12.2 However, Roman Catholics were seen by the government as second-class citizens, as traitors to the state, and so they deserved jobs and houses less than Protestants. Some Roman Catholics did very well whether it was in the civil service or the judiciary, but, as we have said, these were the exceptions that proved the rule. The elected representatives of Roman Catholics were excluded from influence and/or power. Bourke sums up what happened to Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland:

The Catholic section of the Northern Ireland populace became a virtual people unto itself: a community living under the state without being fully a part of the state - a disaffected element set against the communal good. Since the majority alone was taken to constitute the public interest at large, the minority was converted into an aspirant democracy embedded within the polity as a whole.⁹⁹

4.12.3 So, to be a member of the majority in Northern Ireland was to be a member of the state, while membership of the minority meant 'exclusion from effective

⁹⁸ There were some issues about whether the Unionist Government adequately contributed to their upkeep.

⁹⁹ R.Bourke, *Peace in Ireland - The War of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p.93.

sovereignty.’¹⁰⁰ McKittrick strikes exactly the right note when in summing up the history of Northern Ireland under the Stormont regime:

But it was institutionalised partiality, and there was no means of redress for Catholic grievances, no avenue of appeal against either real or imagined discrimination. Freed from any effective oversight the Unionist machine was able to function without any checks or balances or mechanisms which might have curbed excesses.¹⁰¹

‘Institutionalised partiality’ as the characterisation the Unionist regime is a conclusion that will please neither those who see the record of Stormont in either black or white terms. ‘The consensus among those who have looked at the evidence dispassionately is that the picture is neither black nor white, but a shade of grey.’¹⁰²

4.12.4 Indeed the ‘Institutionalised partiality’ becomes even more complex when Whyte gives a geographical analysis of the discrimination. The conclusion is that an area in the west of the province that contained about a quarter of the population of Northern Ireland produced about three quarters of the complaints of discrimination.¹⁰³ For him what comes through is that, ‘the prominence of an area in the west remains. There, the greyness of the picture over most of the province changes to an ominous darkness.’¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the Stormont Government and indeed ultimately the British Government allowed this discrimination to take place. In the next chapter the role of the British Government in relation to discrimination and human rights will come under scrutiny.

¹⁰⁰ R.Bourke, *Peace in Ireland - The War of Ideas*, p.4.

¹⁰¹ D. McKittrick and D.McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.17.

¹⁰² Whyte, ‘How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?’ p.26.

¹⁰³ The areas were Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh, Londonderry County Borough, and portions of Counties Londonderry and Armagh. Whyte, ‘How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?’ p.26.

¹⁰⁴ Whyte, ‘How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?’ p.26.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEATING THE TERRORISTS? (NORTHERN IRELAND UNDER DIRECT RULE)

5.1 Irony

5.1.1 Perhaps the greatest irony of the 'Troubles' is that many of the grievances which we have looked at that helped cause the conflict were quickly dealt with. In October 1969 a Ministry of Community Relations was established, part of whose remit was the improvement of amenities in urban areas suffering from social deprivation. November 1969 saw the establishment of an independent Commissioner for Complaints to deal with grievances against public bodies and local councils. An Electoral Law Act brought in universal adult suffrage for local government elections, and so the franchise that had disadvantaged Roman Catholics was abolished. As Bourke points out 'in the space of just two months, the Catholic population of Northern Ireland had made more tangible political progress than it had even idly fancied over the course of the preceding fifty years.'¹ We have seen that the worst cases of discrimination were caused by local government. The Macrory report on the reform of local government was implemented in December 1970, with the bringing in of twenty-six new district councils and area boards to control education, health and other services. Changes in policing were put in place with the appointment of a Director of Public Prosecutions who replaced the responsibility of the RUC for prosecutions. A Community Relations bill was introduced and a New Deal for Ulster was announced in a package that included aid for development, jobs and housing. Finally, G.B. Newe, in October 1971, became the first Roman Catholic to hold ministerial position since the formation of the Northern Irish state.

5.1.2 Sadly, it was not a case of 'too little too late'; it was just too late. As Peter Taylor has commented on the reforms, 'But it was too late to stuff the genie back in the bottle.'²

¹ R. Bourke, *Peace in Ireland - The War of Ideas*, p.93.

² P. Taylor, *Brits - the War Against the IRA* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), p.33.

The outbreak of communal violence at the end of the 1960s signaled the end of the 1920 settlement of partition, it would take thirty years and over three and a half thousand deaths for a new settlement to begin to emerge.

5.2 What If?

5.2.1 In terms of the response of government, the question is whether anything else over and above the reforms outlined above would have stuffed the genie back in the bottle much quicker?³ The only thing that may have made a difference would have been the imposition of Direct Rule from Westminster, almost as soon as the troops arrived, and the British Government then being responsible for security. Indeed the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association made it clear that the border was not an issue for them but Stormont was.⁴ The army was put in Northern Ireland under the authority of the Stormont Government and the Unionists had their own law and order agenda focussed on the other community which was not shared by the British Army. We have already pointed out the symbiotic relationship that existed between security and government in Northern Ireland. The Falls Road curfew of July 1970 initiated at the behest of the Unionists signaled the break down of the army's good relations with the Roman Catholics. After that, the introduction of internment in August 1971 and the events of Bloody Sunday in January 1972, it became clear that the people of Northern Ireland were in for a 'long war'. When the Unionists refused to hand over security powers to Westminster, the British Prime Minister announced on 24th March 1972 the suspension of the Stormont Parliament and Direct Rule was introduced.

5.3 Back to the Future

5.3.1 With the advent of serious inter-communal strife, which had not been seen since the beginning of the 1920s, and the steam being taken out of most of the issues examined in the previous chapter by reform, controversy in Northern Ireland quickly centred on the violence and what measures should be used to control it. The response of the

³ Here I mean both the Unionist Government at Stormont and also the British Government which with its troops on the streets of Northern Ireland had taken its most active role in the province's affairs for fifty years.

⁴ T. Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.169.

British state to the violence will be the substance of much of this chapter. However, one issue raised in the last chapter continued to be a source of discussion and controversy throughout the 'Troubles' and that was the question of discrimination in employment, or what came to be known as 'fair employment'.

5.4 Fair Employment: A Short History

5.4.1 After the introduction of Direct Rule a committee of review was set up to look at whether policies needed to be introduced to facilitate fair employment.⁵ The committee was chaired by William van Straubenzee. Their 1973 report recommended both statutory anti-discrimination legislation and the setting up of an agency to enforce the legislation.

5.4.2 In 1976 the Fair Employment legislation was enacted and the Fair Employment Agency in Northern Ireland (FEA) was established.⁶ Changes to the legislation came about in 1989. Leading up to these changes there had been a push for change from a number of outside sources. In November 1984 the nine-point MacBride code was launched to encourage fair employment in Northern Ireland.⁷ The code was based on the 1977 Sullivan Principles which related to American investment in South Africa. As well as some concern about some of the details of the principles, the heavy involvement of the very Republican Irish National Caucus led to questions whether the aim of the campaign was to get better levels of Roman Catholic employment or just wanting American companies to leave Northern Ireland and thus fermenting political instability. The Report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights concluded in 1987 that reform of the legislation was needed. One of the fruits of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 was the provision of a mechanism which

⁵ For a comprehensive historical survey post 1969 see R.D. Osborne and Ian Shuttleworth, 'Fair employment in Northern Ireland', in *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland a Generation on* (ed. B. Osborne and I. Shuttleworth; Belfast: Blackstaff, 2004). See also the chronology of events provided at the beginning of the book.

⁶ In 1990 the Fair Employment Commission (FEC) replaced the Fair Employment Agency. In 1999 the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland was created. This incorporated the FEC with other agencies working on areas of equality such as race, sex and disability.

⁷ The MacBride code or principles were named after the IRA chief of staff and later Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs Sean MacBride.

enabled the concern on the part of the Government of the Republic at the inadequacies of earlier anti-discrimination legislation in Northern Ireland to be expressed. Finally, the work of the FEA itself helped to provide a pressing case for change. It had investigated the employment profiles of public bodies and demonstrated disadvantage towards Roman Catholics, so it was clear that more needed to be done.

5.4.3 The 1989 legislation brought in compulsory religious monitoring by employers and a certain amount of permissible affirmative action. So, targets and goals could be set to improve the employment patterns of an employer by relating them to the existing patterns and the geographical catchment area of the employer. For the first time indirect discrimination was outlawed.

5.4.4 What Osborne and Shuttleworth call 'The final extension of the fair employment legislation' came with the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (FETO).⁸ This legislation expanded earlier provisions by extending the anti-discrimination laws to services, facilities and goods. The monitoring that employers were required to do had now to include part-time workers.

5.5 Results of the Legislation

5.5.1 In the context of the United Kingdom, the fair employment legislation was ground-breaking. Fitzpatrick points out that the legislation contains 'statutory novelties' which include review and monitoring. There is also affirmative action which is not found in the British race and sex discrimination laws of the 1970s. For Fitzpatrick the Northern Irish legislation is marked out by having a 'redistributive approach'.⁹ So the FEA was not required to 'have a belief' that there was discrimination in an organization before it could investigate. This meant that the FEA could commission proactive investigation and it did that throughout the 1980s looking at universities and especially the public sector. For Osborne, the most important investigation undertaken by the FEA was into the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Their report in

⁸ R.D. Osborne and Ian Shuttleworth, 'Fair employment in Northern Ireland', p.6.

⁹ Barry Fitzpatrick, 'Review of fair employment case law', in *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland a Generation on* (ed. B. Osborne and I. Shuttleworth; Belfast: Blackstaff, 2004), p.152

1983 led to the Civil Service bringing in thorough equality provisions, incorporating a monitoring of equality.¹⁰

5.6 The Debate

5.6.1 In the previous chapter, five reasons were cited, apart from any discrimination, which were put forward to account for the disadvantages Roman Catholics faced in employment. Differences were examined and dismissed in attitude to work and differences in educational attainment. In the late 1970s and early 80s the debate about discrimination in employment centered around the other three reasons: inadequate knowledge of job opportunities; the concentration of Roman Catholics in peripheral areas; and the larger average size of Roman Catholic families.

5.7 Informal Networks

5.7.1 Those writers associated with the FEA stressed the importance of informal networks. Based on their research on school leavers they concluded that most school leavers get their first jobs through informal contact, where they are told about opportunities by friends and families. As the FEA stated in 1980:

The informal networks which are still so powerful in Northern Ireland and through which so much employment is found, operate to maintain and reinforce employment patterns already established. Once these patterns have been established such a method of filling jobs means that, even if there were never in Northern Ireland a single instance of individual discrimination in the future, the patterns laid down will remain much the same.¹¹

¹⁰ R.D. Osborne and Ian Shuttleworth, 'Fair employment in Northern Ireland', p.4.

¹¹ Cited in Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?', p.15. A story often told in our family confirmed to me the importance of informal networks in securing employment in Northern Ireland. Burkes Department Store on the Newtownards Road in East Belfast was well known for employing only Methodists. Around 1950, my great aunt (who was a Methodist and was a buyer in Burkes) took my mother (who was an Anglican) to Burkes for a job. The manager asked my mother which Methodist Church she went to and she said she went to St. Martin's Church of Ireland. Nonetheless he gave her the job and my mother was the first non-Methodist employed in this large department store.

5.8 The Concentration of Roman Catholics in Peripheral areas; and the Larger Size of Roman Catholic Families

- 5.8.1 In contrast to this focus, Compton does see informal networks as being relatively unimportant.¹² For him what is crucial, in terms of employment, is the fact that three fifths of the Roman Catholic population live in peripheral parts of Northern Ireland where it is difficult to attract investment. The larger size of Roman Catholic families is less important for him than geographical location, but he argues that as state benefit is related to the size of a family, there may be less incentive for Roman Catholic males to work than Protestant. The FEA, in turn, questioned the findings of Compton. However, what is more interesting is the harmonisation of views in terms of the lack of current discrimination. As Whyte concludes, 'Recent research converges on the conclusion that *current* discrimination has only a subordinate part to play in explaining the degree of Catholic economic disadvantage.'¹³
- 5.8.2 One of the results of this academic consensus around current discrimination has been that the debate about communal inequalities in Northern Ireland has moved from the study of open discrimination, towards issues of structural inequality. So, Compton's point about geography would stand as a part of a structure of inequality that has existed since and because of the plantation.¹⁴
- 5.8.3 Another debate that has consistently raised its head around fair employment has been the issue of quotas or positive discrimination. The Straubenzee committee set a benchmark by rejecting the idea of quotas, and that has been a basic assumption of policy ever since, despite the furore over the MacBride principles which were very

¹² Paul Compton, 'Demographic and Geographical Aspects of the Unemployment Differential between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland' in *The Contemporary Population of Northern Ireland and Population-related Issues* (ed. P. Compton; Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1981), p.128.

¹³ Whyte, 'How much Discrimination was there under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?' p.15.

¹⁴ The first book to stress a structural approach to discrimination was L. O'Dowd, B.Rolston and M.Tomlinson, *Northern Ireland: Between Civil Rights and Civil War* (London: CSE, 1980).

much quota based.¹⁵ The reasons they gave for rejecting quotas was that they were trying to get rid of discrimination and that quotas involved discrimination. They also thought that putting a quota policy to work in the febrile political atmosphere they were operating in would be nigh on impossible. Finally, they had a strong sense that fragile community relationships would be fractured even further if positive discrimination was adopted.

5.9 And Today?

5.9. There is no doubt that the work on fair employment has meant that one of the running sores of Northern Ireland has been tackled successfully. The imagination and impact of the legislation has been demonstrated in that workplaces are now largely integrated. The success of this seems even greater when it is measured against the backdrop of increasing segregated living in Northern Ireland. For example, in 2004 it was reported that public housing in Belfast - 28,000 homes - is 98 per cent segregated.¹⁶ So, this is no small achievement. Joanne Hughes notes that Protestants have become more supportive of equality measures (interestingly because they now have a perception that they are discriminated against), and that Roman Catholics no longer have a sense of inequality and unfairness in the way they are treated by the state.¹⁷ There are still anomalies to be addressed, with Protestants being under-represented in the education and health sectors and Roman Catholics still lagging behind in the security sectors and the higher reaches of the Civil Service. But compared to the situation looked at in the last chapter huge progress has been made.

¹⁵ The major exception in terms of quotas was the acceptance of the 1999 Patten report on policing which recommended a 50:50 Protestant/Catholic ratio of recruitment into the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. This is the only example of positive discrimination in Northern Ireland. The reason this was accepted (though it was certainly not accepted by the Unionist community) was that a fully integrated police force was vital if the political settlement of 1998 was to work.

¹⁶ *The Independent*, 6 April 2004.

¹⁷ See her essay, Joanne Hughes, 'Attitudes towards Equality in Northern Ireland: Evidence of Progress?' in *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland a Generation on* (ed. B. Osborne and I. Shuttleworth; Belfast: Blackstaff, 2004), pp.166-183.

5.10 We Are Here to Help?

5.10.1 When secretary of State Peter Brooke made his famous statement on 9 November 1990 that ‘The British Government has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland’, he went on to say that ‘our role is to *help, enable and encourage*. Britain’s purpose ... is not to *occupy, oppress or exploit*’ [my emphasis].¹⁸ In relation to the violence which engulfed Northern Ireland, what has the role been of the British state, to help or to oppress?

5.10.2 Father Raymond Murray is very clear that from a Christian point of view that the British state has oppressed. ‘I have witnessed the state in Northern Ireland kill, torture, bribe, and imprison people unjustly.’ He also states that ‘People were assassinated by policy of the British government’.¹⁹ He provides a charge sheet outlining 16 classifications of the violations of human rights by the British state.

1. *Murder and unjust killings by the security forces.* 148 members of paramilitary organizations and 138 innocent civilians have been killed by the Royal Constabulary (RUC) and the British army; some of these can be classified as murder and some as unjust killings. Prosecutions and convictions of members of the security forces have been avoided in most cases.

2. *Collusion* of the British Intelligence system, members of the Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR) and the Royal Irish Rangers (RIR), members of the RUC, with loyalist paramilitaries leading to the murders of hundreds of Catholics.

3. Widespread and deadly use of *rubber and plastic bullets* resulting in severe injuries and the deaths of 17 people, of whom 8 were children and one was a woman.

4. *Internment* of c. 2,000 Catholic men and 32 women under special powers and the cruel ill-treatment of same.

5. *Inhuman and degrading treatment* of detainees in Palace Barracks, Holywood, and Girdwood Barracks, Belfast, 1971-2.

¹⁸ P. Taylor, *Brits - the War Against the IRA*, p.314.

¹⁹ R.Murray, *State Violence -Northern Ireland 1969-1997* (Dublin: Mercier, 1998), p.10.

6. *Torture* of 14 hooded men by sensory deprivation in Ballykelly Barracks in 1971.
7. *Duress*: Arrested people in the 1970s were forced to sign statements admitting crimes the police wanted to connect them with.
8. *Harassment*: For 20 years nationalists were subjected to arbitrary house searches, house wrecking, beatings, verbal harassment, and census taking by security forces.
9. Ill-treatment of arrested persons in *RUC stations 1972-75*.
10. Ill-treatment of arrested person (s) in the *interrogation centres* at Castlereagh and Gough Barracks 1976-77.
11. Alleged verbal statements of accused given out by the police were accepted on their word in the *Diplock Courts*;²⁰ beating, thumping and kicking prisoners and interrogating them for long periods and putting them in positions of stress, were not accepted as cruel and degrading treatment and statements taken after these forms of ill-treatment were accepted in court. There followed great disparity in sentences and some of the sentences were inhuman. Despite the censures of the British domestic report, the Bennett Report, in 1979,²¹ ill treatment continued centered on beatings designed not to leave marks, on psychological torture and threats, blackmail and the use of supergrasses.
12. Severe *punishments* were inflicted on prisoners who refused to do prison work and wear prison clothes in the 1976-81 period.
13. Degrading *stripping* naked of the women prisoners in Armagh Prison 1982-1986.
14. *18 Innocent* Irish people were imprisoned for long years by police action and judicial procedures in Britain which were contrary to human rights.
15. Some Irish political prisoners in British prisons were treated with *cruelty*.

²⁰ The Diplock Report into the legal procedures required for dealing with terrorist cases was published on 20 December 1972. Because of the intimidation and murder of witnesses and jurors, the recommendation of the report was that terrorist cases should be tried by a judge sitting alone without a jury, with the normal rights of appeal.

²¹ The Bennett Report was published on 16 March 1979. The remit of the report was to examine allegations of ill-treatment at detention centres. We will look at its findings later in the chapter.

16. *The Prevention of Terrorism Act* brought great suffering to many thousands of Irish in Britain. ²²

5.10.3 It is beyond the scope of this work to examine all the accusations of Father Murray in detail. In order to assess whether the British state has a case to answer, and just what that case is, there will be a concentration on certain areas, particularly on the allegations of torture and ill treatment against the Security Forces. This chapter will look at those killed in what are termed 'dubious circumstances' by the Security Forces. Finally, there will be an examination of the issue where there was collusion of the Security Forces with the Protestant paramilitaries and in doing that there will be an attempt to assess the claim of Murray, that 'It is quite clear that the sanction for these violations came from the British government itself.'²³

5.10.4 There will be no examination of the legal apparatus which was used to fight terrorism: the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Emergency Provisions Act. In the end they were passed through Parliament. Instead the focus will be on instances when the state seemed to go beyond the law and an attempt to see who was responsible for that. By the same token, cases like the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four and Maguire Seven were terrible miscarriages of justice; but they were just that, miscarriages and so they will not be examined.

5.11 Torture?

5.11.1 'Beating the Terrorists?' is the title of a book written by Peter Taylor in 1980 which investigates the interrogation methods used by the Security Forces in army barracks and police stations throughout Northern Ireland. ²⁴ The first human rights issue which led to sustained investigation and controversy was the use of the so called 'Five Techniques'. These were methods traditionally used by the army to gain information from suspected insurgents in the British colonies. Apparently the creation of the

²² R.Murray, *State Violence -Northern Ireland 1969-1997*, pp.29-30.

²³ R.Murray, *State Violence -Northern Ireland 1969-1997*, p.31.

²⁴ P.Taylor, *Beating the Terrorists? Interrogation in Omagh, Gough and Castlereagh* (London: Penguin, 1980).

techniques came from statements British soldiers made concerning how they were interrogated during the Korean War. The 'Five Techniques' consisted of having the suspect stand against a wall with arms spread-eagled for hours at a time; placing hoods over their heads to produce sensory deprivation; subjecting them to a continuous high-pitched noise known as 'white noise' to disorient them, and depriving them of sleep and food.²⁵

5.11.2 Eleven selected detainees, arrested during the introduction of internment without trial on the 9th August 1971, known in the security forces as the 'eleven guinea pigs' were subjected to the 'five techniques'.²⁶ However, as the 'five techniques' were standard training for British personnel both in term of interrogating and being interrogated the influence of the 'five techniques' were felt throughout 1971. Amnesty International was concerned enough to visit Northern Ireland and investigate.²⁷ The furor caused by accounts of these interrogation methods led to the Heath Government establishing an inquiry under Sir Edmund Compton, on 31st August 1971. The report was published on 16th November 1971 and Compton famously concluded that there had been a measure of ill-treatment of suspects, but not torture or physical brutality.²⁸

5.11.3 The Irish Government subsequently took the British Government to the European Commission of Human Rights in Strasbourg. On the 2nd September 1976, Britain was found guilty of breaching the European Convention on Human Rights by indulging in 'inhuman and degrading treatment but also of torture'.²⁹ The case was then referred to the higher body the European Court of Human Rights again in

²⁵ P. Taylor, *Brits - the War Against the IRA*, p.65.

²⁶ On the first day of internment three hundred and forty-two Roman Catholics were arrested and not one Protestant. It was not until February 1973 that the first loyalists were interned and by that stage, according to my own calculations, loyalists had murdered approximately one hundred and fifty nine people.

²⁷ Report of a mission by Amnesty International to Northern Ireland, 1971.

²⁸ *Report of the Enquiry into Allegations Against the Security Forces of Physical Brutality in Northern Ireland Arising out of Events on 9th August 1971*, Chaired by Sir Edmund Compton, GCB, KBE, HMSO, Cmnd. 4823, November 1971, p.71. The day that the Compton report was published, the Government announced a further inquiry by three Privy Counsellors under Lord Parker of Waddington to consider whether the 'Five Techniques' needed to be changed. Their conclusion was that the 'Five Techniques' could only be used when it was 'vitally necessary' to get information. In a minority submission one of the Privy Counsellors, Lord Gardiner, provided a contrasting report arguing that 'Five Techniques' were illegal in domestic and probably in international law.

²⁹ P. Bew and G.Gillespie, *Northern Ireland. A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1999), p.115.

Strasbourg which on 18th January 1978 delivered its ruling on the 1976 findings. It concluded by rejecting the commission's use of the term 'torture', as the 'Five Techniques' 'did not occasion suffering of the particular intensity and cruelty implied by the word torture.' But, it still states that the suspects suffered 'inhuman and degrading treatment.'³⁰

5.11.4 It is here that one of the problems in examining security issues in Northern Ireland becomes apparent: actually assessing who was responsible for what. For some commentators miscarriages of justice are ordered by the highest echelons of the state, while others subscribe to the theory of the occasional bad apple.³¹ In terms of the 'five techniques', the conclusion of official investigations was that they were part of an 'oral tradition' within the army and were never written down or given any official imprimatur.³² Of course, we could point out that established precedent seems to be good enough for the British constitution without being written down and that you would think someone in authority would notice when something has been as widespread as the 'five techniques' for almost thirty years. However, ministers were vindicated as it seems they almost certainly knew nothing about them and so they were not in a position either to authorise them or not.³³ The problem seemed to be the transference of tried and tested methods from the British colonies to a part of the United Kingdom. Perhaps grist to the mill for those who saw the conflict in Northern Ireland as a colonial one as thirty years of army precedent and training was abolished when Edward Heath announced on the day the Parker report was published that the 'five techniques' would not be used again.

³⁰ P. Bew and G. Gillespie, *Northern Ireland. A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999*, p.127.

³¹ Some Unionist politicians not only dismissed any 'institutionalised' wrongdoing by the security forces, but also any idea of 'bad apples'. Former MP Ken Magennis argued that in his experience in the security forces he had not come across any bad apples only a small number of 'bruised apples', whose 'level of tolerance is breached'. S. McKay, *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People*, p.214.

³² *Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors Appointed to Consider Authorised Procedures for the Interrogation of Persons Suspected of Terrorism*. Chairman: Lord Parker of Waddington, HMSO, Cmnd. 4901, March 1972, p.12.

³³ *Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors Appointed to Consider Authorised Procedures for the Interrogation of Persons Suspected of Terrorism*. Chairman: Lord Parker of Waddington, HMSO, Cmnd. 4901, March 1972, p.3.

5.11.5 Lord Gardiner, who produced his minority report in 1972, was asked by the British Government in 1975 to produce a report on how the state should deal with the terrorism they were experiencing in Northern Ireland.³⁴ In 1976 the Government adopted the main planks of the Gardiner report as its policy. The three catchwords were, 'criminalization', 'normalization' and 'Ulsterization'. The aim was to try and make every day life in Northern Ireland as normal as possible, to treat the paramilitaries as criminals and abolish special category or political status for prisoners and for the RUC to be the primary agency in fighting terrorism.

5.11.6 With the RUC taking the lead role in arresting and interrogating suspects it did not take long for a number of accounts to begin to circulate in 1977 about the treatment of suspects at the 'holding centre' in Castlereagh.³⁵ It is important to note that wider legal encouragement was given to the RUC interrogators at this time by the change in law regarding the admissibility of confessions. This meant that confessions could be accepted as evidence by the Diplock judge as long as they had not been gotten by 'torture, inhuman or degrading treatment'. Though in *R. V. McCormick, (1977) N.I. 105*, Lord Justice McGonigal wrote that, 'it leaves open to an interviewer to use a moderate degree of physical maltreatment for the purpose of inducing a person to make a statement.'³⁶ The result was, as Dermott Walsh pointed out in a 1981 study, that confessions were involved in 89 per cent of all scheduled (terrorist) cases.³⁷

5.11.7 Amnesty International came to Northern Ireland to investigate the new allegations.³⁸ Their recommendation was that a public inquiry should investigate. The British Government held a private inquiry into police interrogation procedures and practices. The chair was a circuit court judge, Harry Bennett and The Bennett Committee, as it became known, reported in February 1979. The declared aim of the Bennett Report

³⁴ *Report of a Committee to Consider, in the Context of Civil Liberties and Human Rights, Measures to Deal with Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, Chairman: Lord Gardiner, HMSO, Cmnd. 5847, January 1975.

³⁵ 'The volume and nature of the allegations and evidence of ill-treatment provoked expression of concern from police surgeons (some of whom also made their own allegations), churchmen and politicians and resulted in two resignations from the police authority in the late 1970s.' D. Walsh, *The Use and Abuse of Emergency Legislation in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Cobden, 1983), p.41.

³⁶ Quoted in *Human Rights in Northern Ireland a Helsinki Watch Report* (Helsinki Watch USA, 1991), p.31.

³⁷ D. Walsh, *The Use and Abuse of Emergency Legislation in Northern Ireland* p.72.

³⁸ Report of a mission by Amnesty International to Northern Ireland, 1978 .

would, you imagine, receive approval across all shades of opinion in Northern Ireland; it was to achieve ‘a system in which a prisoner who walks into a police office unhurt and unmarked shall be unhurt and unmarked when he leaves that office.’³⁹ The conclusion of the Bennett report was that injuries that were not self-inflicted had been obtained in police custody. The recommendations were that suspects were to be given better access to doctors and solicitors and that closed-circuit television was to be put in all the interrogation rooms. Certainly the Bennett report led to a great reduction in the number of allegations of ill treatment during questioning. However, Walsh reports that not all the Bennett recommendations were fully implemented.⁴⁰ While the Helsinki Watch Report of 1991 stated: ‘It appears that until quite recently the stark physical abuses that attended interrogations during the 1970’s had abated, but the reforms implemented as a result of the Bennett Committee and other studies have not ended human rights violations.’⁴¹

5.11.8 One of the most recent Human Rights reports on Northern Ireland spoke very positively about progress that been made post the 1998 Good Friday agreement:

We are heartened by the numerous and significant reforms made to the policing service in the last five years: the establishment of the PSNI ⁴² and a generally representative Policing Board; human rights training of officers and the publication of a police code of ethics that relies on the European Convention on Human Rights; and the closing of special detention facilities. We also commend the PSNI for instituting the audiotaping of police interrogations.⁴³

³⁹ Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Police Interrogation Procedures in Northern Ireland, Cmnd. 7497, HMSO (London) 1979 (Bennett Report) Paragraph 164.

⁴⁰ D. Walsh, *The Use and Abuse of Emergency Legislation in Northern Ireland* p.77. An interesting historical footnote to the Bennett Report was the role it played in bringing down the Labour Government in 1979. Gerry Fitt the SDLP MP for West Belfast, who always took the Labour whip, was so disgusted on reading the Bennett Report, that when a vote of no confidence in the Government was held on March 28th 1979, Fitt abstained. This was less than two weeks after the report was published and the Government fell losing the vote by 311 to 310.

⁴¹ *Human Rights in Northern Ireland a Helsinki Watch Report*, p.33.

⁴² Formed in April 2002 as one of the recommendations from the Patten Report on Policing.

⁴³ NORTHERN IRELAND: A REPORT TO THE ASSOCIATION OF THE BAR OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK FROM A MISSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS (March 10 2004) <http://www.serve.cpm/pfc/euro/abcny04.pdf>, p.12, (Accessed: 9th April 2005).

5.12 Shoot to kill?

5.12.1 Speaking about the shooting dead of two young Roman Catholic men by the British Army on 8th July 1971, Taylor comments, 'In conflicting accounts that were to become all too familiar in the years ahead, the army said they were gunmen and local people said they were not.'⁴⁴ Such is the contested nature of truth in Northern Ireland. Around one hundred and fifty people were killed by lead and plastic bullets by the security forces in controversial circumstances. The vast majority of these people were Roman Catholics.⁴⁵

5.12.2 Some of controversial killings by the state have had huge effects on the future course of events during the troubles. Taylor refers to the events of Bloody Sunday, where fourteen people were shot dead by British Paratroopers as 'the pivotal event of the thirty-year war' in terms of the boost to the IRA of recruits and propaganda. While the effect on the British was one of the factors that led to the imposition of Direct Rule in March of the same year.⁴⁶ In 1998, the Prime Minister Tony Blair announced a further enquiry to find out the truth of the events on that day. The new enquiry was chaired by a English Law Lord, Lord Saville of Newdigate. The Saville Enquiry began its formal hearings on 27th March 2000 and the final report is expected in early 2010. The final cost is estimated at around £200 million with half of that on lawyer's fees.⁴⁷ The first statement of the Churches in terms of Bloody Sunday was issued on February 27th 1997 in the name of the four main Church leaders in Ireland (Rev Kenneth Best, President of the Methodist Conference in Ireland, Rev Harry Allen, Moderator of the Presbyterian Assembly, Archbishop Sean Brady and Archbishop Robin Eames). The statement welcomed the British Government's agreement to

⁴⁴ P. Taylor, *Brits - the War Against the IRA*, p.83.

⁴⁵ Bill Rolston argues that 88 percent of victims of state killings were from the nationalist community. B.Rolston, *Unfinished Business - State Killings and the Quest for Truth* (Belfast: BTP Publications Ltd, 2000), p.vii. Of the twenty three controversial cases examined by Rolston only one, Brian Robinson, is of a Protestant.

⁴⁶ P. Taylor, *Brits - the War Against the IRA*, p.107.

⁴⁷ [Http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/northwest-edition/daily/article2464116.ece](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/northwest-edition/daily/article2464116.ece) April 19th 2007. The official record of the inquiry is: [Http://www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org.uk/](http://www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org.uk/)

examine new evidence with regard to Bloody Sunday. They also expressed a hope that the government's examination of the new evidence would be done "*expeditiously*".⁴⁸

5.12.3 In 1988 Dermot Walsh provided an overview of security policy since the late 1960s. He pointed out five phases: the handling of the early civil rights demonstrations; the period of internment from 1971-74; the interrogation phase from 1975-1980; the intelligence phase; and the 'shoot-to-kill' phase. He further argues that each of the phases was connected with specific breaches of civil liberties.⁴⁹ Using Walsh's framework and writing at the time of the IRA ceasefire of 1994 McVeigh points out significant changes of security policy post 1988. He cites a decline in the incidence of 'set piece killings'; an increase in willingness to bring to court members of the Security Forces involved in cases of lethal force and a decline in killings by the Security Forces.⁵⁰

5.12.4 Larkin simplifies things by opting for three phases up to 1999. The first phase up to 1979 stressed the primacy of the British Army. The second phase post-1979 which is also termed the 'shoot-to-kill' phase was characterised by the RUC's own elite paramilitary units involvement in a number of controversial killings. Larkin argues that the effect of the international outcry over 'shoot to kill' meant that the British Army regained the primary responsibility for covert operations which almost always were used against republicans. The third phase of security policy which ran from 1985 to the end of the 1990s was the decision to increase greatly the use of informers in all of the paramilitary organisations. For him, the decision to do this was made at the highest levels of government.⁵¹ This decision, in terms of allegations of collusion between the Security Forces and Loyalist paramilitaries, continues to have contemporary ramifications.

⁴⁸ My emphasis. [Http://www.serve.com/pfc/weekly/inu2march97.html#Church](http://www.serve.com/pfc/weekly/inu2march97.html#Church) (Accessed: 4th July 2004).

⁴⁹ D. Walsh, 'The Royal Ulster Constabulary - A Law Unto Themselves?' in M.Tomlinson, T. Varley and C.McCullagh, *Whose Law and Order?* (Belfast: Sociological Association of Ireland, 1988), p.95.

⁵⁰ R. McVeigh, "*It's part of life here....*" *The Security Forces and Harassment in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: CAJ, 1994), p.34.

⁵¹ P. Larkin, *A Very British Jihad - Collusion, Conspiracy & Cover-up in Northern Ireland*, p.296.

5.12.5 While all of the controversial killings were termed 'shoot to kill' in some quarters, a number of specific shootings in the early 1980s have gone down in history as the 'shoot to kill' controversy. The series of alleged shoot to kill incidents in question all involved RUC headquarters mobile support units in County Armagh during November and December 1982. The first incident resulted in the deaths of Gervaise McKerr, Sean Burns and Eugene Toman; the second led to the death of Michael Tighe, shot on a farm near an IRA arms cache; and the third involved the killing of Seamus Grew and Roddy Carroll, at another checkpoint. The allegations that Republican terrorist suspects were deliberately killed rather than being arrested led to an investigation by John Stalker, then deputy chief constable of Manchester, in the mid-1980s. His report was never published, and he was removed from his post just at the point where he believed he was about to obtain an MI5 tape of the shooting of Michael Tighe.

5.12.6 On the 10th of January 2003, Lord Chief Justice Carswell along with two other judges ruled that the British government had failed to investigate the killing of Gervaise McKerr, Eugene Toman and Sean Burns in accordance with Article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights which guarantees the right to life and that relatives of the deceased must be reassured that the killings were lawful.⁵² In July of 2007, it was made public that the Northern Ireland police ombudsman will re-examine John Stalker's files. The Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan revealed that she has been asked by the government to see whether there are legal grounds to reopen the inquiry, focusing on the killing in 1982 of Gervaise McKerr.⁵³ The British government continues to deny that the security forces ever had a shoot to kill policy.

5.12.7 Taylor connects the 1982 shootings in County Armagh, investigated by John Stalker, to the killing of three IRA members in Gibraltar on 6th March 1988 with the phrase 'dead terrorists and no guns'.⁵⁴ The families of Mairead Farrell, Daniel McCann and Sean Savage went to the European Commission on Human Rights. Their claim was that Britain had contravened Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights,

⁵² P. Larkin, *A Very British Jihad - Collusion, Conspiracy & Cover-up in Northern Ireland*, p.296

⁵³ [Http://www.guardian.co.uk/frontpage/story/0,,2130706,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/frontpage/story/0,,2130706,00.html) July 20th 2007

⁵⁴ P. Taylor, *Brits - the War Against the IRA*, p.279.

the right to life. On 6 September 1991, the Commission decided to investigate the shootings. It was 6 June 1994 before they released their conclusion: the British government had not contravened Article 2. On the other hand, the Commission chose to refer the case to the European Court of Human Rights for a final deliberation. Finally, on 27 September 1995, by a 10 to 9 majority, the smallest margin possible, the European Court found the British government guilty of contravening Article 2 of the Convention.⁵⁵ This was the first time ever that a member country had been found guilty of violation of Article 2. Though the Court also ruled that those involved in the killings did not operate a 'shoot to kill' policy.⁵⁶

5.12.8 The instructions allowing the Security Forces to open fire in Northern Ireland are known as the 'Yellow Card', 'Army Code No. 70771-Instructions for Opening Fire in Northern Ireland', specifically:

- 'Firearms must only be used as a last resort.'
- 'A challenge must be given before opening fire ...'
- Weapons can only be used if someone is 'likely to endanger life and there is no way to prevent the danger.'
- Specifically, the use of weapons is justified if 'there is no other way to make an arrest.'⁵⁷

In theory, failure to keep to the above could lead to legal action. However, it has proved notoriously difficult to prosecute successfully any member of the Security Forces for inappropriate use of lethal force. Father Denis Faul sums things up from a Roman Catholic perspective, 'Since 1968 no RUC man has served a day in jail for killing innocent or unarmed people, or for ill-treating prisoners, and the British army

⁵⁵ B.Rolston, *Unfinished Business - State Killings and the Quest for Truth*, p.161.

⁵⁶ D.McKittrick, S.Kelters, B.Feeney, C.Thornton and D.McVea, *Lost Lives - The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2004), p.1114.

⁵⁷ B.Rolston, *Unfinished Business - State Killings and the Quest for Truth*, p.212.

have only put six people in prison and most of them got out within two to three years.⁵⁸

5.12.9 The argument of the state in a case of disputed killing is that the person was a terrorist, or suspected of terrorist activity, that the Security Forces were doing their duty and that there was no premeditation on their part to shoot the victim. The first soldier to be convicted for murder in Northern Ireland was Private Ian Thain in December 1984 for the murder of Thomas Reilly. He served less than three years and was reinstated into the army.⁵⁹ This sentence set a precedent for the amount of time British soldiers would serve for murder in Northern Ireland. Lee Clegg, a paratrooper, served three years and one month in jail for the murder of eighteen year old Karen Reilly on 30th September 1990. Again Clegg was reinstated into the army and indeed promoted.⁶⁰ When two Scots Guardsmen were charged with the murder of Peter McBride on 4th September 1992 their barrister said there was a 'legitimate expectation that in line with government policy they would be released after approximately three to three and a half years'.⁶¹ In both the cases of Clegg and the two Scots Guardsmen the judges commented on their evidence as 'untruthful and incapable of belief' and 'untruthful and evasive'.⁶²

5.12.10 Perhaps the issue of how the representatives of the state are treated illustrates the divide in attitudes and perceptions within Northern Ireland and between Northern Ireland and the British mainland. A number of prominent English public figures and

⁵⁸ B.Rolston, *Unfinished Business - State Killings and the Quest for Truth*, p.308. Earlier in the chapter by Faul we see one of the greatest ever cases of theological optimism and indeed baptismal regenerationalism, 'But the state has recognised that the Catholic people are innocent and hard working people; by their baptism into the church, they are non-violent people.' P.307. All sides in Northern Ireland see their violence as being purely reactive.

⁵⁹ D.McKittrick, S.Kelters, B.Feeney, C.Thornton and D.McVea, *Lost Lives - The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, p.949.

⁶⁰ D.McKittrick, S.Kelters, B.Feeney, C.Thornton and D.McVea, *Lost Lives - The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, p.1208.

⁶¹ B.Rolston, *Unfinished Business - State Killings and the Quest for Truth*, p.242. D.McKitterick, S.Kelters, B.Feeney, C.Thornton and D.McVea, *Lost Lives - The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, p.1208.

⁶² B.Rolston, *Unfinished Business - State Killings and the Quest for Truth*, p.242. D.McKitterick, S.Kelters, B.Feeney, C.Thornton and D.McVea, *Lost Lives - The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, p.1208.

newspapers campaigned for early release of the above soldiers.⁶³ For the Nationalist community there seems to be two standards of justice, one for members of the Security Forces and one for people not in the Security Forces. Indeed for the Protestant community, including the Churches and ecumenical organisations, the perception is that when someone has been shot by the Security Forces they must be either 'mad or bad'. There is a *de facto* presumption that when a person is killed by lethal force by agents of the state that no crime or wrongdoing has been committed.

5.12.11 It is very difficult to find any statement from a Church figure outside the Roman Catholic Church who speaks out against the human rights abuses that were perpetrated. One was in a sermon just after the events of Bloody Sunday preached by Norman Taggart, a Methodist Minister, where he said:

'Terrorists' are not the only people capable of engaging in terrorist activity. Even in a civilised society...the institutions of the state are capable of resorting at least to isolated acts of terrorism. Terrorism is a fact of life in Northern Ireland today...Every bomb thrown, every shot fired, contributes to an already intolerable burden of grief, agony and loss...(of which) the brutal and damaging effects extend far beyond those directly involved.⁶⁴

The positing of the view that the state engages at least in 'isolated acts of terrorism' is a lone voice and in one sermon. Yet, later on in the year Taggart engaged in a controversy with Rev Dr the Lord Soper in the pages of the *Methodist Recorder* when Soper encouraged British people to respond to and atone for what had happened on Bloody Sunday by coming across to Derry to take part in a vigil on the first anniversary of the events. For Taggart, such an action would be disruptive and divisive. In a sense this sums up the unspoken approach of the Church to issues of human rights; that they were disruptive and divisive.⁶⁵

⁶³ Martin Bell and Ludovic Kennedy. *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Daily Mail* who normally campaign on a platform of 'life means life' in relation to murder, but in the case of Northern Ireland it means three years.

⁶⁴ N. Taggart, *Conflict, Controversy and Co-operation - The Irish Council of Churches and 'The Troubles' 1968-1972* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2004), p.73.

⁶⁵ *The Methodist Recorder*, 7, 14, 21 and 28 December 1972.

5.12.12 John Morrow is a Presbyterian Minister, founder member of the Corrymeela community in 1965, leader of that community from 1979 -93, founder member of the Faith and Politics Group and one of the authors of *Breaking Down the Enmity*. In his memoirs he writes how in the 1980s 'Issues of justice and human rights were regularly being raised during this period.'⁶⁶ From contacts made with academic lawyers and others, he chronicles his and Corrymeela's involvement in the formation of the 'Committee for Administration of Justice'. He goes on to say, 'Although I have remained an active supporter of the CAJ, I have some concerns about the dangers of a purely 'rights based' culture unless it is complemented by a spirit of community and a commitment to the 'common good'.'⁶⁷

5.12.13 The example that Morrow gives for his and Corrymeela's involvement in human rights work is that of the UDR or Armagh 4. The UDR 4, James Hegan, Neil Latimer, Winston Allen and Noel Bell, had been convicted of the murder of Roman Catholic Adrian Carroll in Armagh in 1983. He supported a resolution passed at the Corrymeela Community AGM asking for an appeal to be considered in the case.⁶⁸ A successful campaign, supported by unionism, loyalism, the Protestant Churches and the eminent historian Robert Kee resulted in the Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Brooke granting an appeal, which ultimately led to the acquittal in 1992 of three of the group.⁶⁹ Morrow says, 'I tell this story not because it is especially significant but because it was a salutary experience of the dangers of miscarriages of justice unless we are truly vigilant. At the root of so much of our troubles there has been a blindness to injustices around us and a tendency to avoid involvement or to turn a blind eye.'⁷⁰

5.12.14 But, the UDR 4 case was unique. As the *Guardian* remarked it was the first time that 'widespread allegations of a miscarriage of justice have been voiced by Unionists'.⁷¹

⁶⁶ John Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation: A Brief Memoir* (Dublin: Columba, 2003), p.65.

⁶⁷ Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation*, p.65. On CAJ see <http://www.caj.org.uk/>

⁶⁸ Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation*, p.66.

⁶⁹ Neil Latimer remained in prison. See Ian Paisley, Jnr, *Reasonable Doubt -The Case for the UDR 4* (Cork: Mercier, 1991).

⁷⁰ Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation*, p.66.

⁷¹ *Guardian*, 13 February 1991.

While Morrow goes on to point out that other members of the Corrymeela Community have been involved in similar cases, there is no doubt that the most high profile ecumenical involvement in Northern Ireland, in terms of a human rights case of a miscarriage of justice, is both late in the day and involves the section of the community upon whom miscarriages of justice are not normally visited.⁷² It seems that the default position of the Protestant community of subservience to the state in terms of its abuses is also the default position of the ecumenical community and the 'blindness' spoken about above also applies to ecumenical groups.⁷³

5.13 Collusion

5.13.1 In relation to collusion, the question that has been raised consistently over the years is whether there is any organic link between Loyalist Paramilitaries and the Security Forces. For Bruce, Loyalist paramilitaries are by their very nature 'pro-state' and so some measure of collusion would be natural.⁷⁴ However, while commending the work of Fr Murray in bringing to public attention allegations of collusion, Bruce cautions:

Too many of those who have written about the security forces in Northern Ireland have been happy to settle for level of proof that will convince only those who already share their views. Too rarely are the motives of those who make allegations of security-force collusion questioned, when, given the secrecy with which such work would be carried out, good evidence will

⁷² Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation*, p.66.

⁷³ Parkinson, writing about how the UDR 4 campaign had widespread but by no means total support, says: 'Whilst the UDR Four case did lead to many unionists asking questions of the judicial system, it's also true to say that the greater fragmentation of the unionist community (particularly along class lines) and its reticence in challenging their province's legal structure, mitigated against their campaign group harnessing widespread support, even within Northern Ireland.' Parkinson, Alan F. 'Ulster Loyalism and the British Media' [[Http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/media/parkinson/parkinson98.htm](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/media/parkinson/parkinson98.htm)]. 1998. Speaking about the death of Brian Robinson, a Protestant killed by the Security Forces in disputed circumstances, William Smith says in terms of the attempt to campaign about the death, 'There is nobody in the Protestant community or the Unionist community who wanted to touch it with a barge pole.' William Smith, 'Brian Robinson, 2 September 1989, Killed by British army undercover unit', in *Unfinished Business - State Killings and the Quest for Truth* (ed. B. Rolston with M. Gilmartin; Belfast: BTP, 2000), p.203.

⁷⁴ Before I ever engaged in any type of critical reflection on the 'Troubles' I knew that collusion between Loyalist Paramilitaries and the Security Forces existed. Growing up in a Protestant part of Belfast I was aware that the Paramilitaries and the Security Forces lived in the same streets and drank in the same pubs and clubs.

always be in short supply and the plausibility of any story will rest on the credibility of the teller.⁷⁵

For Bruce, there is a vital distinction to be made between pro-state and state terror.⁷⁶ The Republican analysis has been that the Security Forces and Loyalist paramilitaries were one and the same thing. Bruce says, 'Nothing in my research leads me to that conclusion.'⁷⁷ Urban says something very similar: 'My own research has not produced any evidence to suggest that the security forces colluded with loyalist death squads in any planned or deliberate way.'⁷⁸ Until recently, there was no evidence of any organic link.

5.13.2 Sir John Stevens was appointed by the Government to investigate claims of collusion between loyalist paramilitaries. He carried out three Enquiries over almost two decades and in his *Overview and Recommendations*, published on 17 April 2003, he speaks of the Security Forces and "the willful failure to keep records, the absence of accountability, the withholding of intelligence and evidence, and the extreme of agents being involved in murder."⁷⁹

5.13.3 On the 22nd January 2007, the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Nuala O'Loan, published a 'Statement by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland on her investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Raymond McCord Junior and related matters.'⁸⁰ Her investigation started with the 1997 killing by a

⁷⁵ S.Bruce, *The Red Hand - Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p.200.

⁷⁶ S.Bruce, *The Red Hand - Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland*, p.269.

⁷⁷ S.Bruce, *The Red Hand - Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland*, p.269.

⁷⁸ M.Urban, *Big Boys' Rules: The SAS and the Secret Struggle against the IRA* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p.57.

⁷⁹ Stevens Enquiry: *Overview and Recommendations*, 17 April 2003 Sir John Stevens *QPM, DL* Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service. [Http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/collusion/stevens3/stevens3summary.htm](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/collusion/stevens3/stevens3summary.htm) (Accessed 21st April 2006).

⁸⁰ 'Statement by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland on her investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Raymond McCord Junior and related matters.'
[Http://www.policeombudsman.org/Publicationsuploads/BALLAST%20PUBLIC%20STATEMENT%2022-01-07%20FINAL%20VERSION.pdf](http://www.policeombudsman.org/Publicationsuploads/BALLAST%20PUBLIC%20STATEMENT%2022-01-07%20FINAL%20VERSION.pdf)
(Accessed: 23rd January 2007).

UVF unit of a 22-year-old Protestant man, Raymond McCord Jr., who had been a member of the paramilitary group. The victim's father, Raymond McCord, said he had evidence that the UVF unit's commander at the time, Mark Haddock, was protected by police because he was on the Special Branch payroll providing tipoffs on UVF activities. The conclusion was that former officers in Special Branch paid informants in the outlawed Ulster Volunteer Force who were permitted to pursue killings, bombings, drug dealing and extortion. Police colluded with loyalists behind over a dozen murders in north Belfast, the Ombudsman said. The Special Branch officers created false notes and blocked searches for UVF weapons. Her report called for police to reopen dozens of cases from the 1990s and investigate ex-officers involved in cover-ups of their informants' crimes. The commander of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Chief Constable Hugh Orde, said he accepted O'Loan's conclusions and recommendations in full and offered a full apology.

5.13.4 So, the lines, so important for Bruce, between pro-state terror and state terror have at least become blurred. It is perhaps an encouraging sign of times that some theological reflection emerged fairly quickly after this shocking report. In a blog written on 14th February 2007 entitled 'So it was a war then?'⁸¹, David Stevens the Leader of the Corrymeela Community and leading member of the Faith and Politics Group provides two models of looking at the conflict in the light of Ombudsman's report.

5.13.5 Firstly, a 'war' model which in the context of Northern Ireland would have had 'at its simplest a general policy of shooting terrorists on sight and the indefinite detention of all captured terrorists.' Stevens suggested that a version of the 'war' model operated in Northern Ireland between 1971-1975 and that it was unsuccessful by alienating the Nationalist community and providing a steady flow of recruits to the IRA.

5.13.6 'The 'criminal prosecution' model is the model for a 'normal' society where there is a high level of political consensus.' For him the use of this model in Northern Ireland where there was not political consensus and terrorism was not going to be 'fully

⁸¹ <http://www.corrymeela.org/comment/36.aspx> (Accessed: 20th February 2007).

adequate' but that it was still the best model to use. As a model, it had to be supplemented by other methods, some of which were very dubious. The criminal prosecution model which has dominated Northern Ireland since 1975 is different from the war model in that 'a suspect may be kept in custody only if he or she is charged with a specific criminal offence and the prosecution is able to prove his or her guilt beyond reasonable measure.'

- 5.13.7 The moral issues raised by The Police Ombudsman's report have shed a light for Stevens on what the supplementary methods of the 'criminal prosecution' model actually meant 'informers who participated in murder, murder that the agents of the State allowed, or perhaps even encouraged or manipulated as part of the 'war' against terrorism. All to save lives. But how many lives were taken in consequence? And who knew? And who was accountable to whom?'
- 5.13.8 He argues that 'limits and restraints must be observed, otherwise the state becomes, in the words of St Augustine, "organised brigandage" and sections of the Security Forces become indistinguishable in the end from the paramilitaries (as happened in some South American countries in the mid-1970s). Terrorists and Security Forces simply mirror each other.' In the view of Stevens we did not quite have a war because there was always an element of restraint on behalf of the Security Forces. This is only partly true because it has become apparent that some of the restraint has been a facade, as evidence consistently emerges that the Security Forces targeted, tortured and murdered by proxy. Can the British state's self representation of being honest brokers under siege by a terrorist conspiracy really stand up when the relationship between pro-state terror and state terror has been proved to be so much closer than has ever been thought or feared? Stevens argues that, 'There has to be a moral distance between the methods of the terrorist and the methods of those who oppose them.' Surely this moral distance is an inviolable commitment to human rights and civil liberties to which standards the state willingly signed up? His conclusion is that we have lived through very morally queasy times. Yet, the Churches were not queasy when they, with great conviction and certitude, condemned the 'men of violence'. Why not the same condemnation now? As Murray says: 'We didn't have to do the job all the time of condemning paramilitaries for everyone was doing that-the media,

the church. But who was to do the other narrow focus where people in charge of the law were breaking the law?’⁸²

5.14 Conclusion

5.14.1 When the record of the Stormont regime is looked at it can be agreed, with McKittrick, that it was a case of ‘institutionalised partiality’. Post-Stormont, the ‘institutionalised partiality’ has continued but not in the area of jobs and housing but in security policy, human rights and civil liberties. The typical recipient of state violence is a Roman Catholic male between eighteen and twenty five. It is recognised that only a small proportion of the killings during the ‘Troubles’ have been committed by the state, but they have been hugely significant as the state has even refused to indulge in the war time rhetoric of collateral damage, but has adopted a totalising narrative that it has never done any wrong. What has been even more disturbing has been the question of how many further killings were indirectly caused by the state.

The moral standing of any particular state depends upon the reality of the common life it protects and the extent to which the sacrifices required by that protection are willingly accepted and thought worthwhile. If no common life exists, or if the state doesn’t defend the common life that does exist, its own defence may have no moral justification.⁸³

⁸² Fr Raymond Murray in B.Rolston, *Unfinished Business - State Killings and the Quest for Truth*, p.290.

⁸³ J.Walzer quoted in R.Norman, *Ethics, Killing and War* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p.136.

CHAPTER SIX

CHURCHES RESPONDING TO THE TROUBLES

6.1 Introduction and Recap

6.1.1 In the first three chapters the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland was examined. 'The conflict [in Northern Ireland] rests on sharp and overlapping differences in respect of religion, ethnicity, settler-native status, notions of progressiveness and backwardness, national identity and allegiance.'¹ The greatest weight was given to religion as the mainspring of the conflict. In the last two chapters the record of the state in Northern Ireland was looked in terms whether or not all of its citizens were treated in an equal manner. The conclusion was that both under Stormont and then under Direct Rule from Westminster the treatment of Roman Catholics was one of 'institutionalised partiality' - albeit partiality changed, in terms of issues, from Stormont to Westminster. Bourke summing up the experience of Irish Roman Catholics over the centuries and then focussing on Northern Ireland writes:

Three waves of political extirpation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, extensive settlement and resettlement in the same period, a penal code in the eighteenth century, sectarianism and famine in the nineteenth...they all combined to cast a long shadow over twentieth-century memory in Ireland. Moreover, a Provincial government in Northern Ireland, subordinate to the Westminster Parliament since 1920, yet armed with an arsenal of emergency legislation and a sectarian paramilitary police force, was poorly calculated to diminish bitterness and suspicion. Similarly, petty Unionist local government, electoral gerrymandering, and discrimination in housing and employment, did little over the course of fifty years to enhance the prospects of Northern Ireland's political success.²

¹ J.Ruane and J.Todd, *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p.307.

² R.Bourke, *Peace in Ireland - The War of Ideas*, p.38.

Continuing his summary from the beginning of the 'Troubles' he points out that when the Unionist regime was met with resistance, it responded with minimal concessions and then with violence and partiality.³ So here is the raw material from which to construct a theological response to the 'Troubles'. The grand theological narratives of crucifixion and covenant continued to exert great power during the 'Troubles' but how did the Churches respond to the 'institutionalised partiality' of the state and the violence that flowed from it in the late 1960s?

6.2 Beginning?

6.2.1 Ian Ellis writing about the explosion of sectarian violence that signified the beginning of the present troubles in 1968 and what it did to inter-church relations in Northern Ireland comes to the conclusion that: 'The first effect which the outbreak of the 'Troubles' had on official relations between the churches was to drive their leaders together.'⁴ In the light of Ellis's claim the concentration is on what the Churches did and said together in relation to the 'Troubles' If the Churches were able to come together in such a difficult time and circumstances it would surely provide hope for a bitterly divided community.

6.2.2 After the incident at Burntollet bridge in January of 1969, with the worsening situation in the following months culminating in the arrival of British troops on the streets of Northern Ireland on 14th August 1969, the Irish Council of Churches Executive Committee and the leaders of the three main Protestant Churches-Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist-denounced the Burntollet incident and asked the government to inquire into the causes of the present unrest and how it was being

³ R.Bourke, *Peace in Ireland - The War of Ideas* p.38.

⁴ Ian Ellis, *Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations* (Institute of Irish Studies, Belfast 1992), p.126.

handled.⁵ They also approached the Roman Catholic Primate Cardinal Conway to see what the Churches could do to respond to the situation as it unfolded in the North.⁶ Due to the Cardinal's positive response an *ad hoc* committee was formed which consisted of two members appointed by the Cardinal and one each by the Irish Council of Churches Executives, the Methodist President, Presbyterian Moderator and Church of Ireland Primate.⁷ This committee was quickly replaced by regular meetings between the four Church leaders; a situation which remains in place to the present day.

6.2.3 The following year, in the summer of 1970, it was agreed that there should be a joint Irish Council of Churches/Roman Catholic Joint Group on Social Problems.⁸ Ellis comments about this group saying that: 'This was a response to the need for the Churches, in a threatened society, to witness to co-operation across religious divisions on matters of common concern.'⁹ While the formation of this group can be seen as a

⁵Against the advice of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and Nationalist politicians, around forty members of People's Democracy (a Trotskyite group based at Queen's University Belfast) began a four day march from Belfast to Derry in order to highlight injustices against the Roman Catholic community. This march was based, they claimed, on the march from Selma to Montgomery in the United States led by Martin Luther King in 1965. At various junctures along the route the march was heckled by loyalists. On 4th January, the number of marchers had grown to several hundred (along with eighty policemen) and they were attacked by about two hundred loyalists, including some off-duty members of the Ulster Special Constabulary, at Burntollet bridge near Derry. Looking back the march provides interesting parallels with the contemporary debate about the 'right to march' as the nationalist marchers deliberately selected a route to go through loyalist areas and asserted their right to do so.

⁶E.Gallagher and S.Worrall, *Christians in Ulster, 1968-1980*, (Oxford University Press, 1982), p.131.

⁷From 1906 the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches formed the first joint committee of Irish Churches. In 1910 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church invited other evangelical Churches to set up other committees in conjunction with it. The Church of Ireland accepted the proposal and the churches combined together to look together at such things as temperance and the Ne Temere decree. Under the influence of the Lambeth Conference in 1920 the committees developed into the United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communion in Ireland. In 1966 the United Council changed its name to the Irish Council of Churches. The member Churches are: The Church of Ireland; The Coptic Orthodox Church in Ireland; The Lifelink Network of Churches; The Lutheran Church in Ireland; The Methodist Church in Ireland; The Irish District of the Moravian Church; The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church in Ireland; The Presbyterian Church in Ireland; The Salvation Army (Ireland Division); The Religious Society of Friends in Ireland; The Greek Orthodox Church in Britain and Ireland. Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist have observers present at the meetings of the Council. In July 1972 the first full-time secretary was appointed. The Council consists of up to 74 members who are appointed by the member churches an executive committee is responsible for the day to day running of the Council. The above details are taken from the pamphlet: *Ecumenical Relations in Ireland* (The Irish Council of Churches, June 1999). For more detailed background cf. Ian Ellis, *Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations*, pp. 15-24.

⁸Due to the fact that it is the Orange marching season the summer in Northern Ireland is always a particularly tense time for community relations.

⁹Ian Ellis, *Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations*, p.127.

direct result of the 'Troubles', its role has not been to engage with issues directly thrown up by the 'Troubles', but rather to examine and advise upon broader social issues.

6.2.4 The reports produced by the group include: Drug Abuse (1972); Housing in Northern Ireland (1973); Use of Alcohol (1974); The Churches' Response to Underdevelopment in Rural Ireland (1976); Violence in Ireland (1976); Environment (1980); Leisure (1982). After this the Joint Group became the Department of Social Issues and the working groups it set up have issued the following reports: The Church and the Technological Age (1985); Marriage and the Family in Ireland Today (1987); Young People and the Church (1990); The Challenge of the City (1990); Sectarianism: A Discussion Document (1993). A review of the work of the Department was then carried out in 1994 to try and make it respond better to social issues on an inter-church basis. It was again restructured and commenced its new way of operating in 1995. It has held a hearing on poverty in Belfast in 1997 along with a one day conference in the same year in Dublin on 'Unemployment and the Future of Work'. Its focus since then has been on the twin issues of asylum seekers and racial justice.

6.2.5 The studies produced by the joint group, as the official voice of the Churches together during the years of the 'Troubles', are marked by a reluctance to confront the massive social and political problems that were thrown up by a society at war with itself. 1974 saw Northern Ireland descend into near anarchy and civil war as a result of the Ulster Worker's Council strike to bring down the Power Sharing Executive. That year, 220 people died in the 'Troubles'; there were 3,208 shootings; 1,113 bombs planted; 2,453 cases of intimidation and 1,374 people charged with terrorist and serious public order offences.¹⁰ The response of the Churches together was a document on 'The Use of Alcohol'.¹¹ 1982 saw the violent aftermath of the hunger strikes (ended October 1981) which transformed the political landscape of the

¹⁰Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, *Northern Ireland a Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999*, p.97.

¹¹ The first two years of the Northern Ireland state (1920 - 1922) witnessed bloody sectarian conflict, especially in Belfast. The 1921 Belfast District Synod of the Methodist Church cited alcohol as the main cause of the violence that was occurring in the context of the partition of Ireland. Johnston McMaster p.38 in Lectures at St. Anne's 1996 *Brokenness, Forgiveness, Healing and Peace in Ireland*.

Northern Ireland problem and left a community more polarised than ever.¹² That year, 97 people died in the troubles; there were 547 shootings; 332 bombs planted and 686 people charged with terrorist and serious public order offences.¹³ The response of the Churches together was a document on 'Leisure'. In twenty five years the Churches produced two reports which dealt directly with the 'Troubles'. (Violence in Ireland in 1976 and Sectarianism in 1993).

6.3 Violence Report

6.3.1 The 1976 study on Violence was only undertaken by 'special delegation' from the Churches, suggesting that looking at this type of issue was not, and should not be, the norm. Indeed, the agreed report produced by the working party, chaired jointly by Bishop Cahal Daly and the Rev. Dr Eric Gallagher, should be seen as one of the great opportunities lost in trying to produce an agreed ecumenical theology in response to the 'Troubles'.¹⁴ Writing a decade later, the *Project of the Churches on Human Rights and Responsibilities in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland* comments that, 'The report was well received, but little was done to implement the recommendations. Inertia was present.'¹⁵

6.3.2 In terms of actual influence the view is expressed in Bailey that there is evidence that recommendation 5, which asks people to inform the authorities of any illegal activities, may actually have increased the amount of such information provided.¹⁶ Furthermore, recommendation 12, which calls for a process of education within the Churches, is seen as being fulfilled by the setting up of a peace education programme

¹²The significance of the hunger strikes is generally seen as lying in the emergence of Sinn Fein as a political and electoral force. A part of this emergence, and concomitant to it, was the perception created in the Catholic community that the prisoners were people who were prepared to accept suffering for their community and cause as well as inflict it upon others.

¹³ Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, *Northern Ireland a Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999*, p.169

¹⁴ The study produced 16 recommendations which I have included in Appendix 1.

¹⁵ Sydney D. Bailey (Editor) *Human Rights and Responsibilities in Britain and Ireland* (Macmillan Ltd, London 1988) p.157.

¹⁶ Bailey (Editor) *Human Rights and Responsibilities in Britain and Ireland* p.157.

in 1978.¹⁷ Yet, the recommendation does not speak of a peace education programme as such. It is worth quoting in full:

We call for a sustained and far reaching programme of education within the Churches themselves by which their members may be made more aware of the political and social implications of Christianity for Irish society as well as of the democratic methods available for promoting justice and peace.¹⁸

What was actually created by the Churches fell a long way short of the exploration of the political and social implications of their faith by Irish Christians, as well as making known to them the democratic methods available for the promotion of justice and peace demanded by the recommendation. Thus, *contra* Bailey, this recommendation was certainly not fulfilled by what the Irish Council of Churches put into place in 1978.

6.3.3 Other recommendations which the report asked to be put in place had to wait until the eighties and the nineties, either showing the farsightedness of the authors in the context of 1976 or the slowness of implementing good ideas. In recommendation 14 the call is made for closer co-operation and contact between Roman Catholic and other schools. We see this come to fruition at a formal level with the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order, 1989, which asserts that there needs to be two cross curricular themes included in the curriculum which relate to the theme of community relations. These were called 'cultural heritage' and 'education for mutual understanding' (EMU).¹⁹ Recommendation 10, which urged interdenominational

¹⁷ Ellis, *Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations*, p.128. The Irish Council of Churches has operated a peace programme from July 1978. Adult Bible Study guides on peace have been produced, as well as material for primary and secondary schools in conjunction with the Roman Catholic Irish Commission for Justice and Peace. This has developed into The Churches' Peace Education Programme which now employs two teachers in Northern Ireland. In 1984 a permanent Peace Education Resources Centre was opened. This activity would seem to beg the question that without an analysis and agreement on the nature of the conflict peace may mean different things to the two communities. In the absence of this, peace programmes are designed to bring about an absence of conflict; which is not necessarily peace.

¹⁸ Report of a working party appointed by the Irish Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Joint Group on Social Questions (1976) p.93.

¹⁹ See Alan Smith and Alan Robinson *Education for Mutual Understanding: The Initial Statutory Years* (Coleraine 1996). 'Cultural heritage' has three objectives: Objective 1: Interaction, interdependence, continuity

youth activities, did not come about in a structured way until 1992 when Youth Link was set up as an interdenominational youth body for the four main Churches. This body had a difficult start as its formation came about not because there was a great desire by the Churches to do youth work together, but rather on the fact that the British Government refused to fund the Churches' individual youth work, but would fund them if they did their youth activities in some sense jointly. The report in recommendation 11 also urged the Churches to set an example to the rest of society in the place they give to women.

6.3.4 The most important recommendation, in terms of the Churches together developing a political theology which would attempt to draw out and understand the roots of the conflict while pointing out ways forward, was number 7. It states:

We suggest the setting up of a Christian Centre of Social Investigation which would conduct research into problems underlying social and communal unrest and would monitor continuously progress made in removing the basic grievances of discrimination and injustice within civil society that are related to the occurrence of violence. Other problems to be investigated underlie our further recommendations and they are problems which must not be shelved if such a centre cannot be established.²⁰

6.3.5 For the first time the Churches were recognising two important points in relation to Northern Ireland. Firstly, that what they term the social and communal unrest has not occurred in a vacuum but is connected to discrimination and injustice. These are the causes leading to the violence which has taken place. Secondly, this recognition means that the role of the Churches in relation to the state needs to change. The status quo is unacceptable and the Church has a role of analysis as to why this is the case and the further role of a watchman to make sure that change to remove basic grievances takes place. For the Churches to be involved in political and social analysis and then

and change; Objective 2: Shared, diverse and distinctive features of different traditions; Objective 3: International and transnational influences. 'Education for mutual understanding' has four objectives: Objective 1: Fostering respect for self and others; Objective 2: Understanding conflict; Objective 3: Appreciating interdependence; Objective 4: Understanding cultural traditions.

²⁰ Report of a working party appointed by the Irish Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Joint Group on Social Questions (1976) p.93.

stand over and against the state to make sure the necessary changes take place would indeed have been an ecclesiastical paradigm shift in Northern Ireland. What the document shows is a move away from simmering hostility towards the state on the part of Roman Catholics and uncritical support on the part of Protestants to a position of critical solidarity on the part of all the Churches. This recommendation for the address of injustices needs to be set alongside number 5 which asks people to report wrongdoers to the authorities; Bailey does not do this by mentioning recommendation 5 in isolation and failing to mention at all recommendation 7.

6.3.6 An attempt at implementing recommendation 7 may have facilitated a move away from the 'Troubles' being seen as the result of individual sin. The concentration of energies from the Churches would not have just been spent on condemning the 'men and women of violence'. There would have been an identification of political and socio-economic processes that as Brewer and Higgins argue, have led to 'theology being mobilised in the protection and justification of social stratification and social closure.'²¹

6.3.7 This process of social and theological analysis, combined with a prophetic voice on the side of those who were suffering from discrimination and injustice, would have been difficult for all the Irish churches. The Irish theological agenda has always been used to exacerbate and justify difference in terms of culture, race, power, wealth and political participation, whether through the idea of covenant or crucifixion. There have been exceptions to this with discrimination against Protestant dissent and the existence of large Roman Catholic landowners, but these were certainly the exceptions rather than the rule. Thus, recommendation 7 would be especially painful for the Protestant Churches to put into action. Brewer and Higgins paint a grim picture of the role theology has often played in Irish Protestantism.

It has expedited the goal of sectarian inequality, supplied material aid and prosperity in upholding and justifying sectarian inequality to the advantage of

²¹ Brewer with Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland. 1600-1998 The Mote and the Beam*, p.12.

Protestants, and been a source of support when Protestant privilege seemed to be threatened by Catholic advances or interfering British Governments.²²

6.4 Ecumenical Paradox

- 6.4.1 Recommendation 7 offered a new chance to do theology, at least taking into account the experiences of the most marginalised and vulnerable in Northern Irish society. Instead of this, we were left with what might be called ‘the ecumenical paradox of Northern Ireland’. The paradox of ecumenical relationships in Northern Ireland has been that the conflict dividing (or more correctly further dividing) a community, pushed and continues to push the Churches closer and closer together but at the price of addressing neither the causes nor effects of the conflict. Speaking about the reaction of Cardinal Conway to the Protestant Church Leaders in 1969, Beeman and Mahony comment that he ‘suggested in response that the discussion include the whole range of divisive issues: scriptural, doctrinal and pastoral, as well as practical.’²⁴
- 6.4.2 The Churches’ response to his suggestion for an examination of practical issues has been examined. In the past thirty years there has also been a desire to explore the scriptural, doctrinal and pastoral issues which divide Christians in Northern Ireland. Indeed the record in these areas has been particularly impressive, if suffering from what Ellis has characterised as ‘a certain “ecclesiastical remoteness”’ in their work.²⁵ The first meeting (later known as The Inter-Church Meeting) between the members of the Irish Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church took place in September 1973 at Ballymascanlon.²⁶ The meeting heard papers on four main areas of concern: 1. Church/Scripture/Authority; 2. Social and Community Problems;

²² Brewer with Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland. 1600-1998 The Mote and the Beam*, p.13.

²⁴ Josiah Horton Beeman and Robert Mahony, *The Institutional Churches and the Process of Reconciliation in Northern Ireland: Recent Progress in Presbyterian-Roman Catholic Relations* in Dermot Keogh and Michael H.Haltzel, *Northern Ireland and the Politics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge 1993), p.151.

²⁵ Ellis, *Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations* p.128.

²⁶ For an account of the inception, organisation and proceedings of the Ballymascanlon conference in its first few years by two of the participants, see Cahal B. Daly and A. S. Worrall, *Ballymascanlon: A Venture in Inter-Church Dialogue* (Belfast and Dublin, 1978).

3. Baptism/Eucharist/Marriage; 4. Christianity and Secularism. Working parties were then set up to study further under these headings and subsequent meetings held to look at these reports. In May 1977, a fourth meeting of the Inter-Church Meeting was held and papers were heard on: 1. The Church in the Gospels and St.Paul; 2. Historical Breaches in Christendom; 3. Theology of Christian Unity; 4. Principles and Practice. Working parties on Marian Devotion, the Eucharist and implications of Church unity were established at the fifth meeting in March 1980. The mission to those in prison and Christian witness in a secular society were the themes of the sixth meeting in March 1983. The seventh meeting of March 1984 decided to re-organise the meeting with a department of theological questions being set up.²⁷ This department, presently working on a study document on 'The Church', first developed information on cults. It then released a study on the theological implications of the 1987 report 'Marriage and the Family in Ireland Today'. It has produced biblical study notes examining the theme of 'Reading the Bible Together' (1991). In 1993, it brought out documents on 'Ecumenical Principles' and 'Salvation and Grace'. In pastoral terms, documents were produced in 1997 and 1998 on the pastoral care of inter-church couples, inter-Church marriage services and the baptism of children of inter-Church couples.

6.4.3 Thus, the institutionalism of inter-Church relations has basically settled into the pattern outlined by Cardinal Conway in 1969. The whole range of divisive issues scriptural, doctrinal, pastoral and practical have been addressed, all except the most divisive issue, the Northern Ireland state and its past present and future. A look at all the reports that the Churches produced together encourage the view that they were dealing with a religious conflict. Yet, they wanted to show the world that it was not a

²⁷ The pamphlet *Ecumenical Relations in Ireland* (The Irish Council of Churches, June 1999) outlines the further history of the meeting up to June 1999.

Further Meetings have been held approximately every 18 months. The Eighth Meeting was held in March 1986, when the subject of 'The Church and the Technological Age' was considered and the Ninth Meeting in September 1987 dealt with the subject of Marriage. The Tenth Meeting, on the theme of 'Youth Work and the Churches', took place in April 1989. The Eleventh Meeting took place in November 1990 when the subject was 'The Church in Urban Society'. In May 1992 the Twelfth Meeting dealt with the subject of 'Irish Churches in a New Europe'. In October 1993 the first residential Meeting was held and it considered the subject of 'Sectarianism'. The 1995 meeting was held in November with its primary focus being on the Churches' particular contribution to peace. Another Meeting was held in November 1997 when, among other things, the report, 'Freedom, Justice and Responsibility in Ireland Today' was considered. The 25th Anniversary was celebrated in September 1998 with an event in the Ballymascanlon Hotel, Dundalk, and the publication of 'The Irish Inter-Church Meeting: Background and Development'. A further Meeting was held in April 1999 where the issue of Sectarianism received further consideration.

conflict about religion. This is the ecumenical paradox of Northern Ireland: the 'Troubles' drew the Churches closer together, partly because it was the right thing to do and there was a desire to demonstrate that this was not a religious dispute between warring Churches and that all the Churches were united in condemning the men of violence. In more detail, we can see that the reasons for the ecumenical paradox of Northern Ireland are to be found in the political attitudes of the Church authorities and the broader social and political mores of the various communities of faith.

6.5 Political Differences

6.5.1 Conor Cruise O'Brien provides an anecdote dating from 1969 in relation to Cardinal Conway which illustrates the background to the ecumenical paradox of Northern Ireland. O'Brien gives an account of being a member of a Dail committee on the possible amendment of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution which exerted a territorial claim over Northern Ireland. He speaks of how all the Protestant Churches had made submissions in favour of the removal of the articles. Then Cardinal Conway appeared arguing that the Protestant claims were unfounded, as the Articles in question expressed an aspiration, not a specific territorial claim. He goes on to say:

I was sitting beside the Cardinal, and I had with me a copy of the Constitution, open at Articles 2 and 3. I laid the document before him drawing his attention to the definition of "the national territory" (in Article 2) as consisting of "the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas". The Cardinal neither replied nor looked at the text. He just took the copy of the Constitution between finger and thumb and tossed it, in a graceful arc, to a distant corner of the Committee room. This was not an angry gesture; the Cardinal was quite calm. This was just his way of signaling that the argument was over, and that he had won. The Committee took the hint and did not recommend any change in the Articles.²⁸

²⁸ Conor Cruise O'Brien *Ancestral Voices: Religion and Nationalism in Ireland*, p.90.

6.5.2 Here we see the Church leaders diametrically opposed to each other on one of the most basic issues in Irish political life. Taylor tells of the Anglican Primate Robin Eames going to meet the Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds in the summer of 1993.²⁹ Reynolds had been working on a version of the 'Hume-Adams' proposals. When he showed his paper to the Archbishop he was informed that the contents of it would never be acceptable to the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland as it was 'greener than green'. With these differences in political views between the hierarchies of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches, it is perhaps not surprising that in relation to the question of Northern Ireland they adopted the approach of many Irish people, summed up in a Northern saying which became a commonplace response when quizzed about the 'Troubles', "whatever you say, say nothing."³⁰

6.5.3 Yet, this is not entirely fair as we have seen. Valuable work was done in many areas where the communities were divided. Consistently and courageously over the years the Church leaders have provided a united voice and front against violence. The initial coming together was as a result of the Protestant Leaders speaking out against the violence at Burntollet. Indeed, at a time when feelings were running high in his own community as a result of the introduction of internment without trial in August 1971, Cardinal Conway refused to take the easy route of popularity with his own people by simply condemning internment. He criticised internment and then went on to attack the IRA as a 'small group of people who are trying to secure a united Ireland by the use of force... Who in their sane senses wants to bomb a million Protestants into a united Ireland?'³¹

6.5.4 Stevens provides a similar analysis to Dunlop, referring to the difficulty of the Northern Irish Churches in establishing any 'critical distance' from the communities they come from, and speaks of their tendency to be comfortable as 'chaplains' to their

²⁹ Peter Taylor *Loyalists* (Bloomsbury, London 1999), p.223.

³⁰ 'Whatever you say, say nothing' is a Northern Irish saying and the title of a poem by the Nobel Prize winning poet, Seamus Heaney www.poetry.mirandasbeach.com/content/view/745/53/ (Accessed: 4th March 2006).

³¹ Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, *Northern Ireland a Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999*, p.39.

own.³² However, he does elucidate the argument that is often heard from the Churches, in reply to the criticism that they did not respond with enough positive initiatives to try and bring an end to the ‘Troubles’. He says:

On the other hand, religion can be a force for restraint and this has been generally true in Northern Ireland. Without the churches the situation would have been a lot worse; the preaching and living out of non-retaliation, forbearance and forgiveness has had real social consequences. The churches opposed those who espoused violence and the gods of nationalism. Churches working together have been a force for good; they have helped lessen the religious/political symbiosis.³³

6.6 A Theology of the Latest Atrocity

6.6.1 Nonetheless, the joint response of the Churches to the ‘Troubles’ was always just that, a response. Their public utterances were inevitably to denounce some act of violence or other and to appeal for tolerance and understanding. Their theological reflection on the situation has amounted to what has been termed a ‘theology of the latest atrocity’.³⁴ Their theological reflection has always been a reactive one and they have been content with this; with any more positive role in exploring the interaction between faith and politics showing cracks in the unity which the leaders have tried to present since 1969.

6.6.2 The ‘theology of the latest atrocity’ is not a copyright held solely by the Church leaders. A disproportionate amount of theological reflection in relation to Northern Ireland has been done at gravesides. It is then that the point is reached where we can no longer avoid the issues that really divide us, and these are not the ‘scriptural’, ‘doctrinal’, ‘pastoral’, ‘practical’ but those for which we are prepared to kill one another. There can be argument about correct theological method, but whether or not it is a critical reflection on praxis, theology in Northern Ireland has often consisted of

³² David Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation* (Dublin: Columba, 2004), p.82.

³³ Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness*, p.82.

³⁴ The phrase is Martin Rowan’s.

an emotional response to someone else's praxis. There undoubtedly has been a place for the Churches' joint condemnation of violence over the years. But when this is not allied to any sort of joint analysis as to why the violence is taking place and what, if any, role the Churches have played in causing and perpetuating the violence then mere condemnation of violence can ring rather hollow. It has become clear that the state in Northern Ireland does not have clean hands in terms of violence. Jim McVeigh in an article on 'The Irish Church and Republicanism-The need for liberation theology' makes the same point from a Republican perspective:

Has the Church the courage to address the causes of that conflict in the same way and with the same energy that it has condemned Republican violence?³⁵

6.7 Limits

- 6.7.1 It should be noted that what the leaders of the Churches can and cannot do is also related to what their communities will allow them to do.³⁶ In order to understand the constraints upon the leaders we need to understand the communities they come from and the restrictions that their core beliefs put upon them.
- 6.7.2 The most recent comprehensive survey of religious attitudes in Northern Ireland was begun in 1993 by Frederick Boal, Margaret Keane and David Livingstone, geographers from Queen's University Belfast, and was published in 1997. The scope of its research is limited to Roman Catholics and Protestants in Belfast, but provides an important snapshot into religious life in Northern Ireland.³⁷ The report, in fact, points out that they were surprised to discover a great convergence across all the

³⁵ 'The Irish Church and Republicanism -*The need for Liberation Theology* in *The Furrow*, January 1999, p.3. At the time of writing the article Jim McVeigh was a prisoner in Long Kesh and Officer Commanding the Provisional IRA in the prison.

³⁶ The freedom for manoeuvre is different within the four churches with the leaders of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches only elected for one year. Within Presbyterianism and Methodism a certain amount of continuity is provided by the offices of Clerk of the Assembly and the Secretary of Conference respectively.

³⁷ Frederick W. Boal, Margaret C. Keane, David N. Livingstone *Them and Us? Attitudinal Variation Among Churchgoers in Belfast* (Institute of Irish Studies Belfast, 1997). In terms of variations of religious attitudes outside Belfast: I would suggest that we would see more polarised views among churchgoers in the border areas of all denominations, while among the Protestant denominations we would find a more conservative set of political/theological views in what is termed as 'Ulster's Bible belt' around Ballymena.

denominations in terms of their characteristics and convictions. In general, the Churches are found to be very similar in terms of gender balance, mostly women, age profile, middle aged-elderly, and social class composition. The work notes that organised religion does not attract the working classes in the same proportions as it does the middle classes, and few unemployed are among the Churchgoing ranks, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic.³⁸

6.7.3 As a whole Churchgoers in Belfast are painted as being conservative and very attached to what they see as being their traditional doctrines. There is an ardour in their devotional practices with Protestants centering their devotion more on the Bible and religious conversion and Roman Catholics more committed to the idea of a community of faith. Yet, despite these differences in theological emphases, there is great similarity in the ethical codes of all the Churches. This similarity is especially marked in the area of sexual ethics. There is even agreement on the precise circumstances in which one might find abortion to be legally acceptable though the issue of abortion is a more burning one for Roman Catholics than Protestants. Another contrast in terms of their moral foci is that Roman Catholics are less disciplinarian and are more likely than Protestants to stay within the religion they were born into.³⁹

6.7.4 If we look at the attitudes that they have to one another, overall there is strong support for cross community contacts and mixing. So, within Church life there is support for and encouragement of ecumenical activities. In contrast to this when ecumenism is broadened out from Church life to include other types of interaction between the communities, there is an unwavering group exclusiveness in three very important areas: marriage, schooling and in housing. The survey does not give us information on how deeply these views are wedded to the residential segregation that exists in Northern Ireland or whether there are other reasons for this. The report tells us about the great rupture that exists between the communities, they say:

³⁸ Frederick W. Boal, Margaret C. Keane, David N. Livingstone *Them and Us? Attitudinal Variation Among Churchgoers in Belfast*, p.169.

³⁹ Frederick W. Boal, Margaret C. Keane, David N. Livingstone *Them and Us? Attitudinal Variation Among Churchgoers in Belfast*, pp.168-169.

What is certain is that a deep chasm exists in respect of identity, whether national or political, and in their respective sense of place. Catholics feel strongly Irish as compared to tiny numbers of Protestants and, in turn, few Catholic churchgoers express a sense of being British. Not unexpectedly, then, the gap between their respective visions of the future is great. Most Protestants see their future within a United Kingdom context, while most Catholics envisage it within an all-Ireland framework.⁴⁰

6.7.5 We see religious communities largely mirroring the views of their leaders. In fact little seems to have changed from the position we saw in 1969. From the beginning of the 'Troubles' the premise of ecumenical work has been that bringing people together to examine the divisive issues which Cardinal Conway identified (scriptural, doctrinal, pastoral and practical) would have a trickle down effect politically, or be the leaven in the political dough, thus eventually transforming the political enmity that existed. This would occur without the political divisions needing to be explicitly examined. Not surprisingly, the undefined political paradigm shift which the Churches have looked for has not occurred despite years of dedicated work and millions of pounds thrown into ecumenical work.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Frederick W. Boal, Margaret C. Keane, David N. Livingstone *Them and Us? Attitudinal Variation Among Churchgoers in Belfast*, p.169.

⁴¹ There was a lack of interest from the British Government in community relations until the second half of the ninety eighties. For the first time then they established a clear community relations policy. Hennessy states that this policy had three aims: (a) to increase opportunities for contact between Protestants and Catholics; (b) to encourage tolerance of cultural pluralism; and (c) to seek to achieve equality of opportunity for all citizens in Northern Ireland. Hennessey, Thomas, *A History of Northern Ireland 1920-1996*, p.243. Groups who were fulfilling the three aims were supported by funding from the government. This was not without controversy as one of the reasons for the new policy seemed to be in response to the rise of Sinn Fein (See Hennessy p.243) and heavy funding was given to Roman Catholic Church projects in West Belfast seemingly to try and provide a bulwark against republicanism. Several groups also had their funding withdrawn when their activities were deemed to be too 'political'. Thus a marked reluctance of ecumenical and reconciliation groups to address political issues was exacerbated by the feeling that if they were suddenly to do so there was the possibility they would lose their funding. Speaking at Corrymeela in 1979 Eberhard Bethge focussed on Bonhoeffer stressing the difficulty of the church responding creatively to political situations if it relies on funding from the state. This advice was not taken on board in subsequent years. See Eberhard Bethge *Prayer and Righteous Action* (Christian Journals, Belfast 1979).

6.8 Future

6.8.1 The Boal, Keane and Livingstone report also contains an important warning for the future of ecumenical activities and relations within Northern Ireland. It is not surprising that the report notes that Church attendance is an activity which has more attraction for the middle-aged to elderly than for the young. But of those young people who are involved in their Churches, there is a theological conservatism among young Protestants in contrast to a more liberal approach among young Roman Catholic Churchgoers.⁴² The implications of this are that the ecumenical constituency that has existed since 1969 is in danger of fracturing if the next generation of clergy and leaders in the Churches reflect the views of the present generation of Churchgoing young people. In their conclusions, they argue that, 'there are good grounds, then, for querying the stereotypical perceptions of Catholics and Protestants in Belfast as discrete monolithic groups.'⁴³

6.8.2 In order to have an authentic taxonomy of political and religious belief among the religious communities in Northern Ireland we need to go beyond the two 'big' labels as the only ones which matter in terms of theological/political difference. Age, social class and, for Protestants, denomination makes some difference to the views the people will hold. These factors can also lead to beliefs and values being shared across the sectarian divide. Such common ground has existed and been cultivated by ecumenical groups over the years. The barren ground has been finding common ground for shared political reflection emerging out of the overlap in moral and theological views which exists; in short a political theology.

6.9 Conclusion

6.9.1 We have outlined that the overwhelming response of the Churches to the conflict was to 1) condemn the violence 2) deny that the conflict was a religious one and 3) show a united face to the world at the cost of avoiding any divisive issues. One would have

⁴² My own experience in training for the ministry of a Protestant church and then working as a University Chaplain in an ecumenical setting (both North and South) would strongly confirm these findings.

⁴³ Frederick W. Boal, Margaret C. Keane, David N. Livingstone *Them and Us? Attitudinal Variation Among Churchgoers in Belfast*, p.168.

perhaps hoped that the Churches working together ecumenically would have had a more prophetic response than the Churches tied in with being 'community chaplains'. Especially as it was into the ecumenical movement that resources were poured and great hopes invested. Sadly, the desire to show a united front between the Churches meant that many of the difficult questions, such as discrimination and human rights, were left behind. As Geraldine Smyth says, 'the expectation of sharing of platforms or pulpits would expose political ambiguities and theological differences within their own ranks.'⁴⁴ Thus we have the ecumenical paradox of Northern Ireland that the 'Troubles' did not divide the Churches, it brought them closer together, but the price of unity was that they were unable to go beyond the ritual condemnation of violence. The Violence Report was also a missed theological opportunity to develop a political theology and a more critical attitude towards the state. We now turn to the most sustained attempt to develop a political theology of the 'Troubles' through the work of the Faith and Politics Group.

⁴⁴ Geraldine Smyth OP, 'In the Middle Ground and Meantime: A call to the Churches in Northern Ireland to find Themselves on the edge', in *Religion and Politics in Ireland at the Turn of the Millennium* (ed. James P Mackey and Enda McDonagh; Dublin: Columba, 2003), p.104.

CHAPTER SEVEN

‘BREAKING DOWN THE ENMITY’ - THE FAITH AND POLITICS GROUP

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 There has been very little political analysis or vision provided by the Churches together over the years in contrast to their work in other areas. The work of the Faith and Politics Group provides an exception to that rule and a window into the sort of political theology the Churches produce when they come together.
- 7.1.2 The background to the work of the Faith and Politics Group can be found in the Greenhills Ecumenical Conference which was held in 1966 at the Greenhills Presentation Convent near Drogheda in the Republic of Ireland. Greenhills was part of the great ecumenical impetus given to Irish Christianity by the Second Vatican Council. It became an annual one day conference, held during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, with invited speakers on a particular subject. Ian Ellis comments on the nature of the Greenhills conference (and the one at Glenstal which began two years earlier): ‘Although numerically limited, they have provided a focus of wider ecumenical life in Ireland, as distinct from the work of officially structured bodies, and they have served as a constant and regular encouragement for committed ecumenists.’¹
- 7.1.3 At the 1983 conference held in January there was a proposal to set up a Christian Centre for Political Development whose function was to look at the way the Churches related to politics in Ireland as a whole and to see what changes, if any, needed to be made in this relationship.² The steering committee which was appointed

¹Ellis, *Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations* p.118. Ellis also mentions the “high standard of reflection” maintained over the years at both Greenhills and Glenstal p.118.

²It should be remembered that all of the Churches function on an all Ireland basis, the only church which operates differently is the Free Presbyterian Church in *Ulster* (my italics) of Rev. Ian Paisley.

brought other people onto the group and they found that the initial idea of a permanent centre to be too ambitious at that particular time; so they focussed on the second task, examining the relationship between faith and politics here.³

7.1.4 Even before it began its work the incipient Faith and Politics Group made its first contribution to Irish Christian life by introducing the idea of a permanent centre to examine the relationship between faith and politics on our island. We can see the seeds of this idea in the proposal for a Christian Centre of Social Investigation in recommendation 7 of the Violence Report.⁴ This has been a recurring theme for various groups who, in different ways, have reflected on the conflict here. One of the foci of the Kairos group, which began to criticise the work of the Faith and Politics Group in 1986 with an approach based on the categories provided by the South African Kairos document, was the setting up of a faith and politics centre to provide a radical critique of the approach of the established Churches and what they saw as their representatives in the Faith and Politics Group. The inspiration for this was the idea floated by the Greenhills conference before the Faith and Politics Group produced its first document.⁵ In their strategy document, *Thinking Biblically Building Peace (Beyond 2000 A Strategy For a New Era)* published in 1999, ECONI (Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland), propose a 'Centre For Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.'⁶ The aim is the provision of a permanent centre providing research facilities, accessible resources and space for reflection to facilitate what they term as 'biblical thinking', on a number of concerns in Ireland today.⁷ These concerns can be

³ *Breaking Down the Enmity: Faith and Politics in Northern Ireland* (An Inter-Church Group on Faith and Politics, 1985), p.3. Subsequently referred to as BDE.

⁴ See Appendix 1.

⁵ As admitted by the chair of the Kairos Group Michael Ritchie in private conversation with the author on 9th December 1999.

⁶ In 1988 a pamphlet was published, as an Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland, called 'For God and His Glory Alone.' It was signed by around two hundred evangelical leaders and it set out ten biblical principles as a response to the conflict here. Since then ECONI has through publications, conferences, and grass roots work in churches among the evangelical community, sought to encourage people to ask themselves questions about their identity as followers of Jesus in a divided community. In 1994 with the peace process gaining momentum ECONI became constituted as a trust and appointed a staff team to help Christians respond to what was a rapidly evolving situation. It is interesting that the initial work of the Faith and Politics Group initiated two responses: a radical one from the Kairos group, and a conservative one from ECONI. The ECONI response was much the more positive of the two in terms of the issues raised by *Breaking Down the Enmity*; we shall examine both in detail later in this work.

⁷ Though what exactly biblical thinking is remains undefined.

classed under four broad headings: 1) Community; 2) Citizenship; 3) Culture; 4) Conflict. In April 2005 the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland replaced ECONI.

7.2 The Body of Work

7.2.1 The first document produced was *Breaking Down the Enmity* first published in *Studies [the Irish Jesuit Quarterly Review]*, January 1985, printed in pamphlet form in January 1986 and reprinted in December 1986. The next document that appeared was *Understanding the Signs of the Times* (1986). The group was also the driving force behind the *Declaration of Faith and Commitment* by Christians in Northern Ireland which was published and distributed in June 1986.⁸ These first three documents, along with a new introduction, were, in January 1987, re-issued under the title *Choose Life. Towards an Island that Works: Facing Divisions in Ireland* (1987) This was then reprinted in March 1998, with the addition of a Christian Peace Commitment. Then came *Towards Peace and Stability: A Critical Assessment of the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (1988), *Remembering Our Past: 1690 and 1916* (1991), and *Burying Our Dead: Political Funerals in Northern Ireland* (1992). All of the above were released together, with a new introduction, under the title *Breaking Down the Enmity* in 1993. Then, *The Things that Make for Peace* (1995), *Liberty for the Captives? The Early Release of Politically Motivated Prisoners* (1995), *Forgive us our Trespasses ...? Reconciliation and Political Healing in Northern Ireland* (1996), *Doing unto Others: Parity of Esteem in a Contested Space* (1997), *New Pathways: Developing a Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (1997), *Remembrance and Forgetting* (1998), *Self-righteous Collective Superiority as a Cause of Conflict* (1999) and *A Time to Heal: Perspectives on Reconciliation* (2002).

7.2.2 In theological terms what is unique about the Faith and Politics group can be seen above in the canon of their work; one can find a road map of the significant political

⁸ It is stated that *The Declaration of Faith and Commitment* (An Inter-Church Group on Faith and Politics, 1986) was read by some forty thousand people. See *Towards an Island that Works: Facing Divisions in Ireland* (An Inter-Church Group on Faith and Politics, 1987) p.5. A *Christian Peace Commitment* was produced as a development of the *Declaration of Faith and Commitment* in December 1987 and is contained as an appendix in *Towards an Island that Works: Facing Divisions in Ireland*.

events in the history of Northern Ireland in the last twenty years or so by reading their documents. Here for the first time we see an ecumenical contextual political theology of the 'Troubles'. In terms of the breakdown of the body of their work, both McMaster and Power agree that there is a change in focus after the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994. 'The documents produced between 1995 and 1997 highlighted the new opportunities and context following the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994.'⁹ They looked at some of the contentious issues that were being raised during the peace process such as, prisoners, weaponry held by paramilitary organisations, security policy and policing. Also the broader issues of the process were examined: sovereignty, forgiveness and reconciliation and parity of esteem. In terms of the pre-1994 documents for Power, 'From 1983 until 1993 their work concentrated upon producing ideas for the settlement of the conflict in Northern Ireland'.¹⁰

7.2.3 I would argue that in relation to the contextuality of Northern Ireland there needs to be a more nuanced understanding of the body of their work during this ten year period. Certainly the documents finishing with *Towards Peace and Stability: A Critical Assessment of the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (1988) are about the issue of a broad settlement. The early nineties were one of the periodic times of despair during the 'Troubles', when any hopes of a broader settlement seemed like a long way away. The Faith and Politics Group reflect that time as well with their move to more clearly defined areas of interest and analysis in the early nineties with *Remembering Our Past: 1690 and 1916* (1991) and *Burying Our Dead: Political Funerals in Northern Ireland* (1992). After the Agreement of 1998, the group tackled some of the wider theological issues which would allow the Agreement to flourish and take root between deeply wounded and suspicious individuals, communities and Churches.

7.2.4 While the documents are produced for reflection and to stimulate discussion, there is no way of assessing how deep or wide the use is and influence have been. However, it

⁹ Johnston McMaster, 'Churches and Politics', in *A Tapestry of Beliefs: Christian Traditions in Northern Ireland* (ed, N. Richardson; Belfast: Blackstaff, 1998), p.307 and M. Power, *From Ecumenism to Community Relations: Inter Church Relationships in Northern Ireland 1980-2005* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), p.176. In her list of the Group's documents on p.254 she leaves out both the 1998 document *Remembrance and Forgetting* and the 2002 document *A Time to Heal: Perspectives on Reconciliation*.

¹⁰ Power, *From Ecumenism to Community Relations: Inter Church Relationships in Northern Ireland 1980-2005*, p.176.

has been important for the group that the documents have provided an opportunity for discussion with a disparate group of individuals and organisations on the various aspects of the 'Troubles' reflected in the documents. As John Morrow says, 'We also arranged many meetings with leading members of political parties, the police, Orange Order, church leaders and church groups in order to understand their viewpoints and to debate our pamphlets. It was an important part of our peace witness.'¹¹

7.3 Breaking Down the Enmity

7.3.1 The attention in this chapter is on *Breaking Down the Enmity* because, as Power rightly points out, it plays the role of 'setting the tone' for the work of the Faith and Politics Group. It will also help to compare and contrast the theological responses given to this document.¹² The document is a reflection on the relationship between faith and politics, focused on Northern Ireland, but also examining Ireland as a whole.¹³ One of the strengths of the group is that they have reflected the fact the Churches are organised on an all Ireland basis, and so they have rightly looked at the totality of relationships within the island of Ireland. Indeed, *Towards an Island that Works* (1987) provided a different focus by looking at things from a southern perspective, examining the relationship between faith and politics in Southern Ireland and how this links into the conflict in the north. In this particular document there is more of a dynamic sense and a broader sweep than in the previous two documents, with an outline being provided of changes that have taken place in Southern society over the decades, with a particular examination of how these changes effected the north and the prognosis they provide for future positive relationships.

7.3.2 The point is made that one of the important things about *Breaking Down the Enmity* is the group that has been involved in producing it: 'Protestants and Roman Catholics, Northerners and Southerners, struggling together with the issues of faith and politics

¹¹ Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation: A Brief Memoir*, p.80.

¹² Power, *From Ecumenism to Community Relations: Inter Church Relationships in Northern Ireland 1980-2005*, p.177.

¹³ BDE p.3.

in Ireland today, and the relationship between them.¹⁴ This is, indeed, the importance of the group in that it provides us with the first example of an inter-church group producing theological and political reflections on the situation in the North as a whole and not simply on a specific issue such as violence. Some, such as Eric Gallagher, had been involved in producing the Violence Report, which we argued represented a lost opportunity for beginning to create a theology of the 'Troubles'.

7.3.3 The stress is made that all the participants in the group are acting in an individual capacity.¹⁵ However, the group was made up of prominent Church people (especially so on the Protestant side of the group) with only three out of the initial group of thirteen being lay people.¹⁶ With the Corrymeela Community, the Glencree Centre for Reconciliation and the Irish School of Ecumenics acting as co-sponsors for the project, added to the fact that the group was based at the inter-church centre of the Irish Council of Churches, we see that the group very much came from and represented the official ecumenical consensus on the North which we have outlined earlier in our work.¹⁷

7.4 Outline of the Document

7.4.1 The outline of the document is as follows:

Introduction; Section 1: Fear, Enmity and Conflict; Section 2: The Scriptures, Conflict and Reconciliation; Section 3: Implications for the Irish Churches; Section Four: Faith and Politics; Section 5: Christian Criteria for Politics in Ireland; Section 6: Political Realities

¹⁴ BDE p.3.

¹⁵ BDE p.3.

¹⁶ BDE p.3. In the group producing one of the more recent documents: *Remembrance and Forgetting* (1998) four out of fifteen are lay people.

¹⁷The Corrymeela Community was begun in 1965 at Ballycastle, County Antrim, by the Rev. Ray Davey, a Presbyterian Minister. He had been a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II and, based on the Taizé and Iona Communities, he saw Corrymeela as place where Christians from all over Europe could explore the meaning of reconciliation together. See Ray Davey *Take Away This Hate: The Story of a Search for Community* (Northern Ireland, no date). For an account of all peace and reconciliation groups in Ireland with their varying foci cf. I.M. Ellis (Editor), *Peace and Reconciliation Projects in Ireland: A Directory*, (3rd edition revised, Belfast: Irish Council of Churches 1986).

7.4.2 The document begins by quoting Ephesians 2:14, which refers to Christ breaking down the enmity between Jews and Gentiles and making the two one.¹⁸ The idea of fear and enmity provides, for the group the theological key to explicate the Northern Ireland situation and is the central axiom of the document. Stevens, one of the contributors to the document spoke of how,

when we sat down and talked about our personal fears and enmities.

Suddenly, things got real and a relationship was established between us which involved an acceptance of difference and different perspectives, and enabled us to do constructive work together. We were in a small way a laboratory of reconciliation.¹⁹

7.4.3 In the first section of the document, they explore the idea that the fear and enmity that exists between the communities is God's judgment on Northern Ireland, with the whole circle of conflict that exists emerging out of this.²⁰ Moving on to the second section, they broaden out their subject by saying what the scriptures have to say about fear and enmity and then attempt to fit this into a conceptual theological framework of covenant, sin, forgiveness and the kingdom. The next section of the document narrows its focus again by combining reflection from the actual political situation pertaining in Northern Ireland with the scriptures and applying that to the Churches and what their role should be. In the fourth section, they consider the general relationship of faith to politics. The section then finishes with statements from each of the main Churches expressing their views on how politics and religion relate to one another. Section five then concentrates on providing Christian criteria for politics in Ireland. The sixth and final section is seen as having a different status from the rest of the document. In this section, based on their previous arguments, they try and outline what they see as the political realities of the Northern conflict. The reason it has a different status is that they argue that the conclusions they come to are not the only ones possible. In contrast to the rest of the document they state in

¹⁸ In the quotation used the reference to Jews and Gentiles is left out making it obvious that they intend the text to refer to Protestants and Catholics.

¹⁹ Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation*, p.13.

²⁰ BDE p.3. Section 1 FEAR, ENMITY AND CONFLICT pp.3-13.

relation to section six: '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.'²¹

7.4.4 In terms of their political thinking, they reflect the difficulties of all ecumenical groups in discussing the political future of Northern Ireland. 'We did not come to any agreed conclusion about what ought to be the long term constitutional position of Northern Ireland.'²² But they are clear in disagreeing with the agreed conclusion of the Nationalist New Ireland Forum that the best way forward was a unitary state.²³ Their conclusion is that there is a need to work for new political structures in order to be what they term, a 'Sign of the Kingdom'.²⁴ Though they do agree that Northern Ireland should remain as an Administrative Unit.²⁵

7.4.5 Four themes from the document will be selected which have become the standard ecumenical theological response to the 'Troubles'. They are: idolatry, psychologising the conflict, equality of sin, and reconciliation.

7.5 Idolatry

7.5.1 The first theme to be examined is idolatry. As Power says, 'The entire tone of the Faith and Politics group's work during the initial period from 1983 to 1993 centred upon the idolatry of sectarianism and the need for Christian reconciliation'.²⁶ For the group, the people of Northern Ireland commit idolatry by putting commitment to political identity first and by 'worshipping the false God of sectarian interests and not the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ.'²⁷ Christians must be careful not to identify

²¹ BDE p.4.

²² BDE 6.2 p.32.

²³ BDE 6.10 p.36.

²⁴ BDE 6.11 p.37.

²⁵ BDE 6.3 p.32.

²⁶ Power, *From Ecumenism to Community Relations: Inter Church Relationships in Northern Ireland 1980-2005*, p.177.

²⁷ BDE 1.2 Idolatry and Judgement in Politics p.5. See also 2.2 Injustice and Idolatry pp.13-15.

the will of God with a political programme 'otherwise they fall into idolatry'.²⁸ This statement is then given flesh within the Northern Irish context in the next section 'Christian Criteria for Politics in Ireland'.

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 allegiance as following Christ.²⁹

7.5.2 It is interesting that, in terms of idolatry they connect both Republicanism and Loyalism with the danger of idolatry and not what are seen as the more moderate terms of Nationalism and Unionism. Presumably the reason is the connection of Loyalism/Republicanism with paramilitary groups? Though, in theory, one could be a pacifist Loyalist or Republican. 'The claims of a United Ireland or Union with Britain are subordinate to the Kingdom of God.'³⁰ A Unionist or Nationalist could fail this idolatry test as much as a Republican or Loyalist.

7.6 Psychologising the Conflict

7.6.1 One of the features of the document and of the language of the churches when they are speaking of the conflict in Northern Ireland is the use of psychological terms to explain the conflict. Yet, the question remains whether at least part of the conflict is about more than feelings. In 5.5 there is a very clear statement of how within the Bible injustice occurs: '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.'³¹ It might be thought that the next sentence in *Breaking Down the Enmity* would be an application of the Biblical teaching in the context of Northern Ireland asking what is oppression in Northern Ireland? Who are the poor and deprived? Who is excluded from the community? But the application of

²⁸ BDE 4.2 p.26.

²⁹ BDE 5.1 Idolatry p.28.

³⁰ BDE 5.1 Idolatry p.29.

³¹ BDE 5.5 p.29.

the Biblical view does not happen. The document rather goes back to the issue of judgement: 'In Northern Ireland we hear and see the judgement of God in the way that humanity has been distorted, that the Roman Catholic Community has not received full parity of treatment and esteem.'³²

7.6.2 There is then a pulling back from their statement in 5.5 that injustice has been done to the Roman Catholic community over a number of years. Indeed one can only ascertain that it is injustice they are referring to by inference from the fact that the previous sentence referred to injustice in terms of the Bible. Even with this built - in ambiguity they make the further statements in 5.5 and 5.6 that the injustice suffered is not an objective thing but rather should be measured and examined in terms of feelings and perceptions. 'There will be no peace in Northern Ireland until both communities *feel* included.'³³ 'Policies which increase in sections of the population the *sense* of being wronged,'³⁴ while with the 'fact' that unemployment is more severe in Roman Catholic than Protestant communities, Nationalists then '*interpret* this as being due to discrimination.'³⁵

7.6.3 Writing almost twenty years later, Stevens of the *Faith and Politics Group* says: 'Thus the Protestant Churches in Northern Ireland often talk about law and order, reflecting a community under siege, and the Catholic Church often talks about justice, reflecting a community feeling of victimisation.'³⁶ While the Protestant community are actually 'a community under a siege', the Roman Catholic community are only entitled to a '*feeling* of victimisation'. Indeed, this has been the constant response of ecumenical groups reflecting on the 'Troubles': if the conflict is about feelings rather than any structural injustices which need to be addressed, then the correct response to the 'Troubles' is to get people together in order to reconcile the feelings they have about themselves and the other community. What needs to be addressed is not the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, discrimination, security, but the terms used

³² BDE 5.5 p.29.

³³ BDE 5.5 pp.29-30. My Emphasis.

³⁴ BDE 5.5 p.30. My Emphasis.

³⁵ BDE 1.3.2.4 p.9. My Emphasis.

³⁶ David Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation*, p.83.

by *Breaking Down the Enmity*: 'fear', 'resentment' and 'enmity'. The document speaks about injustice in a number of places, without one concrete example of injustice in Northern Ireland being given.³⁷ Protestant Churches are encouraged to ask themselves certain questions and one of them is, 'What should be their attitude to *alleged* abuses of human rights by the security forces?'³⁸ While the clearest expression given in terms of justice and injustice is, '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'.³⁹

7.6.4 Of course, the whole psychology of the conflict is important. But if it is the only thing that is addressed, to the cost of examining the injustices which the document does mention, then this approach can actually lead to asking people to be reconciled to a situation of injustice, as they are in a situation where everyone's feelings of fear, enmity and resentment are seen as equally valid. Yet if one person or group is an oppressor and the other oppressed then it would seem to be an ethical failure to reconcile the oppressor and oppressed without any objective change in the situation of oppression. This is the focus of the Kairos group's criticism of the *'Breaking Down the Enmity'* document which will be examined later.

7.7 Equality of Sin means Equality of Guilt?

7.7.1 In stressing the psychological quality of the conflict, the whole theological approach of the document and subsequently of the ecumenical community is that there is in Northern Ireland an equality of sin and an equality of guilt, though if blame has to be expressed it is taken as a given that it rests upon the paramilitary groups. The meaning of judgement, which the document begins with, sets out the view that the conflict here is partly the judgement of God, specifically on Irish Christians who have failed to witness to a God who has no favourites.⁴⁰ Yet, the judgement is not something God

³⁷ BDE 1.2 p.4; 2.2 p.14; 2.2.2 p.14; 2.3.4 p.15; 3.6 p.21; 3.9.1 p.24; 5.5 p.29.

³⁸ BDE 3.8.7 p.23. My Emphasis.

³⁹ BDE 3.9.1 p.24.

⁴⁰ BDE 1.2 pp.3-4.

has brought upon Northern Irish Christians but rather they have brought it upon themselves. Theologically, the group is wanting to move from God being seen as acting on behalf of one side or another; they wish to create a theology of inclusiveness not exclusiveness, which has been the case with Irish theologies in the past.

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.⁴¹

7.7.2 The statement that God has no favourites is by no means theologically uncontentious. The decisions made by the Latin American Roman Catholic bishops at Medellin and Puebla to commit their church to have a 'preferential option for the poor', would suggest a different view from *Breaking Down the Enmity*. Two years before the document was written the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, David Shepherd, published his book *Bias to the Poor*, contending that the poor were the favourites of God not just in Latin America, but also in Britain of which of course Northern Ireland is still a part.⁴² At the time *Breaking Down the Enmity* was written, there were clearly more poor Roman Catholics than Protestants in Northern Ireland. Sadly, this does not figure anywhere in their theological deliberations. One of the Roman Catholic authors of *Breaking Down the Enmity* writes in his own book that for him 'no attempt is made to be impartial: priority is given to the rights of the poor, who are defined as 'the people'.'⁴³

7.7.3 Examining the biblical concept of injustice of 5.5, we see how the analysis of the document is caught between their theological and political instinct towards inclusivity and the political realities of Northern Ireland where one community has exercised dominance over another. The pull towards inclusivity is clearly stronger: 'The other party is always the 'guilty' party, the obstacle to progress and therefore we, who are

⁴¹BDE 5.4 p.29.

⁴²D. Sheppard, *Bias to the Poor* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983).

⁴³Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.159.

the 'just', the 'innocent' party, cannot do anything at all.'⁴⁴ There is a call 'to acknowledge that both sides were to blame for the disagreements which have resulted in and have perpetuated the separation of many Christian communities.'⁴⁵ While for Roman Catholics the question is raised, '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?'⁴⁶

7.7.4 Just as an important point was made above about having a theology of inclusiveness the document is beginning to make the point, brought out more forcefully later by Liechty and Clegg, that the sectarianism of Northern Ireland and its perpetuation 'relies on a culture of blame'.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, as De Gruchy points out, 'The doctrine of sin means that we are all in this mess together, none is innocent even though not all are equally guilty except, as we shall suggest, in a metaphysical or ontological sense...But the fact that all have sinned does not mean that all sins are equal, only that none is entirely faultless.'⁴⁸

7.7.5 For McVeigh, one of the problems with the view in Northern Ireland of one side just being as bad as the other, which is the mantra both of ecumenical and community relations in Northern Ireland, is that 'sectarianism is institutionalised by the stature of the state in Northern Ireland and as such it empowers Protestants and disempowers Catholics'. As we pointed out previously, much has been done in terms of fair employment, but the residual effect of a sectarian state and continuing policies under Direct Rule is that Roman Catholics are disadvantaged over Protestants on every major economic and social indicator. In a variation of 'the men of violence are to blame' scenario, McVeigh argues that guilt in Northern Ireland has become an issue of 'individual pathology rather than institutional culpability.'⁴⁹ Northern Ireland

⁴⁴ BDE 1.5 p.12.

⁴⁵ BDE 3.4.1 p.19.

⁴⁶ BDE 3.8.7.1 p.23.

⁴⁷ Liechty and Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, p.18.

⁴⁸ De Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*, p.192.

⁴⁹ Robbie McVeigh, 'Symmetry and Asymmetry in Sectarian Identity and Division', *Journal for Community Relations Trainers and Practitioners* (Summer 1977), pp.8-9.

perhaps needs to learn from liberation theology and thinking about sinful structures and structural sin, where someone can be both a victim of sin and guilty of sin at the same time.

- 7.7.6 Niebuhr's criticism of any Barthian-type theology was, that because it focused on the sinfulness of human beings, it did not take into account people's contributions which were relatively good or evil. Niebuhr emphasises: that in the Bible there is an equality of sin but also an inequality of guilt:

Specially severe judgments fall upon the rich and the powerful, the mighty and the noble, the wise and the righteous....The simple religious insight which underlies these prophetic judgments is that the men who are tempted by their eminence and by the possession of undue power become more guilty of pride and of injustice than those who lack power and position.⁵⁰

- 7.7.7 How is guilt apportioned in Northern Ireland? For the Nationalists, the British and the Unionists are guilty. For the Unionists, it is the Nationalists, or perhaps more particularly, the IRA. For Socialists, it is the Capitalists who divided and conquered the working class by using religion. So, we seem to go back to square one in the playing of the blame game, and it is hard to see how this will take us any further forward in finding a more just and equitable future. However, without wanting to posit absolute blame and guilt, we can still apportion relative guilt. Lennon points out that wrongs have to be acknowledged if there is to be any healing of the memories in Northern Ireland.⁵¹

- 7.7.8 The greatest amount of guilt needs to be apportioned to the organisations (non-state and state) that took lives in the course of the 'Troubles'. Someone can be oppressed in many ways: you can deny them a job, a house, even liberty, but there is no greater oppression than to take the life of someone. That is the one thing that can never be replaced. There may be some scope to argue that there was some justification for defensive violence at the beginning of the conflict. But very soon both sides

⁵⁰ R.Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol 2 (New York: Scribner, 1941), p.18.

⁵¹ Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.115.

descended into a long, grubby and bloody sectarian war, in which the forces of the state became involved. There was a real chance to end the conflict in 1974 with the Sunningdale Agreement, but the conflict dragged on for twenty years more than it needed to.

7.7.9 If we examine in detail the responsibility for deaths in the troubles some interesting facts emerge. The Security Forces were responsible for 365 deaths (9.9%), Republicans for 2158 (58.3%) and 1099 (29.7%) by the Loyalists. If we break down the figures further, we see that the Provisional IRA was the greatest single taker of life (1781, 48.1%). Indeed the IRA killed more of its own members and other Republicans (163) than were killed by the Security Forces (135).⁵² Republican paramilitaries also killed more Roman Catholics (381) than were killed by the Security Forces (316).⁵³

7.7.10 There are two caveats to make here. Firstly, while the Security Forces were responsible for far fewer deaths than the paramilitaries on either side, many of the deaths they were involved with generated huge controversy and in some cases (Bloody Sunday), as has been pointed out, changed the whole course of the conflict. Secondly, as has been seen, recent events have established the relationship between the Security forces and the Loyalist paramilitaries. It now seems clear that the Loyalist paramilitaries were used by agencies of the British state to kill by proxy. So some of the deaths which are credited to the Loyalists may well also have a Security Force hand in them. But, it is doubtful whether the true figures will ever be known.

7.7.11 Next in the order of demerit there is the British state. As Lennon states:

The wrongs that the British have done to Irish people need to be acknowledged...It applies to events such as the Ulster Plantations in the seventeenth and the Penal Laws in the eighteenth centuries. It also applies to the famine...It also applies to the more recent events such as Bloody Sunday

⁵² D.McKittrick, S.Kelters, B.Feeney, C.Thornton and D.McVea, *Lost Lives - The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, pp.1534-1536.

⁵³ MT.Fay, M.Morrissey and M.Smyth, *Mapping Troubles - Related Deaths in Northern Ireland 1969-1998* (Londonderry: INCORE, 1998), p.28.

and the unjustifiable killings that have been carried out by the members of the security forces since 1968 and covered up.⁵⁴

7.7.12 Then there is the majority community in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Protestants. Within that community those in positions of power during the institutionalised partiality of Stormont need to be singled out. Also those, especially the middle classes, who benefited from the regime. The Protestant Churches need to be included since:

The failure to challenge political injustices and political injustices and political dominance of one section of the community over another, was to allow a factory of grievances to produce the inevitable. It was a passive support for a political system that could not be squared with the values of the Kingdom of God. The silence itself was part of the overidentification with a political ideology, in this case unionism. That overidentification ensured that the church had no prophetic voice and no critical perspective.⁵⁵

Working class Protestants were less guilty than the upper classes in that they suffered from bad social conditions, though less so than working class Roman Catholics. The working class Protestants were third class citizens, while the working class Roman Catholics were fourth class citizens.

7.7.13 Others could perhaps be cited, but the point is that guilt in Northern Ireland is not absolute and because of that it is dynamic. So, the role of the British is different from Bloody Sunday to the 1998 agreement. The role of the paramilitaries has also shifted over the years. In looking at guilt in Northern Ireland, I have found helpful the idea of Minjung from Korean theology. The Minjung are the oppressed and exploited people; but who actually belongs to them cannot be presupposed by class, sexual, ethnic, racial or religious criteria. As Kim Yong Bock says:

⁵⁴ Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.115.

⁵⁵ Johnston McMaster, 'Lecture Four', in *Brokenness, Forgiveness, Healing and Peace in Ireland: What Should the Churches do?*, p.35.

Woman belongs to minjung when she is politically dominated by man. An ethnic group is a minjung group when it is politically dominated by another group. A race is minjung when it is dominated by another powerful ruling race. When intellectuals are suppressed by the military power elite, they belong to minjung. Of course, the same applies to the workers and farmers.⁵⁶

With this in mind it is then possible to examine a particular moment in Northern Irish history and see who can be identified as the minjung and who is guilty of their exploitation.

7.8 Reconciliation

7.8.1 The dominant theological paradigm for the Faith and Politics Group and for ecumenism generally in Northern Ireland has been the idea of reconciliation: 'The Churches task is to be the sign of the Kingdom and of God's desire for reconciliation.'⁵⁷ This was the case even before the 'Troubles' began. Speaking about the incipient Corrymeela community in 1964 John Morrow says, 'We had a conviction that the central theme of the gospel was 'reconciliation' and that we were being called to put this conviction to the test in practical ways.'⁵⁸ However, with the Roman Catholic desire for justice and the Protestant focus on law and order, reflecting the political desires and needs of both communities, the most high profile and pervasive theological response to the 'Troubles'; that of reconciliation emerged as a compromise which has managed to hold the Churches together.

7.8.2 The key biblical text in terms of reconciliation, is 2 Cor. 5:19 'that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us' (NRSV).⁵⁹ For Lochmann, this is,

⁵⁶ Quoted by Bastiaan Wielenga, 'Liberation Theology in Asia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (ed. Christopher Rowland; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.48.

⁵⁷ BDE 3.4 p.18.

⁵⁸ Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation: A Brief Memoir*, p.29.

⁵⁹ Quoted in BDE 4.2 p.25.

‘One of the main soteriological statements in the New Testament’.⁶⁰ As a theological term reconciliation contains implications for wider society. The Gospel is about breaking down barriers between God and human beings, but also about destroying barriers that divide people one from the other. When the Gospel is viewed like this it is clear that the reconciliation the Gospel brings does not just have personal implications but also political and social consequences.⁶¹ As a concept ‘reconciliation’ has moved from being an almost exclusively theological term to one that is involved in assessing relationships within and between states and communities.⁶²

7.8.3 In *Breaking Down the Enmity* we see the easy movement that the idea of reconciliation allows from the individual to the corporate. ‘It is, then, particularly appropriate for those who wish to follow Him ourselves to bear witness to the possibilities for human reconciliation that are contained in non-violent action.’⁶³ While ‘There can be no reconciliation between the two communities until the separate identity of each is recognised.’⁶⁴

7.8.4 There is no particular problem with the definitions of reconciliation given by members of the Faith and Politics Group. Both Morrow and Stevens see reconciliation as involving inter-related dynamics of ‘forgiveness, repentance, truth and justice.’⁶⁵ While between Stevens and Lennon, though both members of the Group, there is a different emphasis given between them in terms of the place of justice. For Stevens, ‘The language of reconciliation is seen to be a richer language than that of justice,’⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Jan Milic Lochmann, *Reconciliation and Liberation* (Belfast: CJL, 1980), p.77.

⁶¹ De Gruchy, *Reconciliation Restoring Justice*, p.1.

⁶² ‘Mission’ and ‘Regeneration’ are also theological terms which within the last twenty years or so have secured a place in the broader discourses of economics and politics. ‘Reconciliation is a term that increasingly figures in our vocabularies, throughout the Western world and beyond.’ Norman Porter, *The Elusive Quest: Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2003), p.12.

⁶³ BDE 3.6 p.21.

⁶⁴ BDE 6.2 p.32.

⁶⁵ Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation: A Brief Memoir*, p.84 and Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation*, p.22.

⁶⁶ Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation*, p.15.

while Lennon states, 'Theologically, the reason why reconciliation and justice must go together is that they are two sides of the same coin'.⁶⁷

7.8.5 The issue is the way that the practice of reconciliation has worked itself out in Northern Ireland. Stevens admits that reconciliation has 'been shamelessly misused to slide away from issues of injustice and rightful disturbance.'⁶⁸ It can be used as a way of avoiding conflict and change. Althaus-Reid points out that

The theology which encourages forgiveness without change has been called by Latin Americans 'Ostrich Theology' because, like the ostrich...it puts its head under the ground instead of facing the situation. Such theology uses a cover up of cheap forgiveness instead of being part of a process in whose origins we have the denunciation of the oppressive structures.⁶⁹

7.8.6 The great difficulty for reconciliation in Northern Ireland, as it works itself out on the ground, is that it has largely made sure that it has not criticised the Security Forces or the government. The reason is that only by avoiding contentious issues (such as human rights and equality) can Unionists be kept on side. So, the justice part of the definition of reconciliation slips quietly away.⁷⁰ As McMaster comments, 'In a very real sense, theology is always praxis, either the praxis of domination and exploitation, or the praxis of freedom and justice.'⁷¹ Actually Lennon provides a microcosm of the problem with his own work unashamedly taking its inspiration and methodology from liberation theology; but when the work of the Faith and Justice Group is looked at, of which he is an integral part, very little of his own passions and concerns come through. Here again we see the ecumenical paradox of

⁶⁷ Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.18.

⁶⁸ Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation*, p.22.

⁶⁹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, 'Reconciliation in the Struggle: Theological Reflections from the Rebellious Women of Latin America', in *Open Hands: Reconciliation, Justice and Peace Work Around the World* (ed. Barbara Butler; Bury St.Edmunds: Kevin Mayhew, 1998), p.402.

⁷⁰ Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.159.

⁷¹ Johnston McMaster, 'Lecture Four', in *Brokenness, Forgiveness, Healing and Peace in Ireland: What Should the Churches do?*, p.36.

Northern Ireland with the concern for unity above all else and an attitude of “Whatever you say, say nothing”.

It is my judgement that church interpretation... has tended to trim and domesticate the text not only not only to accommodate regnant modes of knowledge, but also to enhance regnant modes of power.⁷²

7.9 Conclusion

7.9.1 In this chapter examining the work of the Faith and Politics Group, there has been a concentration on their first document *Breaking Down the Enmity*. From this document four themes have been picked out which have shaped ecumenical political theology in response to the ‘Troubles’. These themes are those of idolatry, psychologising the conflict, equality of sin, and reconciliation. A critique of each has been provided and it is clear that the ‘institutionalised partiality’ of Northern Ireland and of the British Government was not engaged with at all. As a political theology of the ‘Troubles’ it falls far short of what was needed.

7.9.2 The authors of *Breaking Down the Enmity* declared at the outset that the aim of the document was to elicit discussion and response.⁷³ One response to *Breaking Down the Enmity* was produced by the *Drumcree Faith and Justice Group*, drawn from the deprived community that lives alongside the Garvaghy Road in Portadown. The group came together after a public meeting in July 1985 in the midst of nightly rioting in relation to the imminent Orange Church Parade.⁷⁴ Their reply was facilitated by Brian Lennon over the course of a year and they published their result in *The Story of a Journey* in 1991.⁷⁵ Lennon speaking of their response says that they were:

⁷² Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (London: SCM Press, 1993), p.vii.

⁷³ BDE p.3.

⁷⁴ For an account of the genesis and subsequent activities of the group cf. *Freedom From Fear Churches Together in Northern Ireland (The proceedings of a conference organised by the Churches' Central Committee for Community Work)* Edited by Simon Lee (The Institute of Irish Studies Belfast 1990) pp.33-36

⁷⁵ *The Story of a Journey* Portadown: Drumcree Faith and Justice Group, 211 Churchill Park, 1991.

Critical of a middle class bias in the Faith and Politics Group's document but also accepted the validity of many of the issues raised by *Enmity*.⁷⁶

In our next two chapters we will look at further responses to *Breaking Down the Enmity*.

⁷⁶ Lennon *After the Ceasefires Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.12.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AN EVANGELICAL RESPONSE

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 For many of those outside Northern Ireland the image that springs to mind in terms of political theology is one of a firebrand evangelical preacher. Historically to be an evangelical in Northern Ireland was to be anti - Roman Catholic and strongly Unionist. One of the changes in the past twenty years has been the emergence of evangelicals who are seeking both theological and political rapprochement with Roman Catholics and Nationalists.

8.1.2 Glenn Jordan refers to these type of evangelicals in Northern Ireland as 'Inclusivist'.¹ They tend to favour engagement in their encounter with the world. Many of them, especially those in positions of leadership, seem to have spent significant amounts of time living outside Northern Ireland and so they bring a more global perspective in terms of the place of evangelicalism in the broader stream of Christian tradition.² Jordan notes that it was almost invariably true that those who were ambivalent about their Protestant, Unionist and British identity had spent a significant proportion of their life living, working or studying outside Northern Ireland.³ Of course, this could be turned around and the argument made that those more open to questioning the theological and political status quo were more likely to travel and live abroad. The theological centre of the inclusivists is that knowing Jesus is the most important thing upon which everything else is contingent. For Jordan, inclusivists are special in

¹ G. Jordan, *Not of this World? Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2001). Jordan's work is based on seventy-two separate interviews with evangelicals from all walks of life in Northern Ireland, which provided over one hundred hours of taped conversations. He classifies Northern Irish evangelicals under six headings: Pietistic Evangelicals *Growing more like Jesus*; Oppositional Evangelicals *Standing on the ramparts of orthodoxy*; Inclusivist Evangelicals *Navigating the river of faith*; Confessional Evangelicals *Preserving the content of truth*; Cultural Evangelicals *Finding Security by association*; Charismatic Evangelicals *Embracing the wildness of the Spirit*.

² Jordan, *Not of this World? Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland*, p.29. My own experience with Irish Methodism would confirm that those clergy who had served overseas had a very different and more open perspective from those who had remained at home.

³ Jordan, *Not of this World? Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland*, p.107.

the context of Northern Ireland because for him they have brought about a basic change in the understanding of the word 'evangelical'.

The shift in understanding that has moved 'evangelical' from a noun to an adjective seems to be the preserve of inclusivists, who recognise a distinction between the historical faith in the evangel and the subculture that has grown up around evangelicalism. Inclusivists remain wholly committed to the evangel, finding their faith enriched by interaction with other Christians, but are also aware that evangelicalism must be constantly redefined.⁴

8.1.3 Evangelical influence within Northern Irish Protestantism has become increasingly important. A Presbyterian Church Board of Social Witness survey has shown a split between Presbyterians who believe in the necessity of a 'born-again' experience to be a Christian and those who do not.⁵ Bruce and Alderdice found that between one-fifth and one-quarter of all Protestants were people who say that they are born again or had a 'born-again' experience.⁶ Indeed, Stevens speculates that as many as one-third of regular Churchgoing Protestants are people who say that they are born again or had a 'born-again' experience and the percentage is increasing.⁷ In the same volume Alwyn Thomson says that 'it is evangelical Churches that tend to be full'.⁸ Of course, he does not provide any empirical evidence for this and makes it as a statement of faith and does not say whether these are new believers or simply a redistribution of wealth from other Churches. But the perception within Northern Ireland not just in terms of numbers within Churches, but reflected in those offering as clergy of the various Protestant denominations, is that Thomson is not too far wrong. For the *Faith and Politics Group*, 'The evangelical tradition is in many ways the key to the whole Protestant Community.'⁹ Jordan suggests that the influence of

⁴ Jordan, *Not of this World? Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland*, p.32.

⁵ D. Bamford & B. McCullough, *Burning Issues* (Belfast: The Board of Social Witness, Presbyterian Church in Ireland 1990).

⁶ S. Bruce & F. Alderdice, 'Religious Belief and Behaviour' in P. Stringer & G. Robinson (eds.), *Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland: The Third Report* (Belfast: Blackstaff press 1993).

⁷ David Stevens, 'Differences and Commonalities', in *A Tapestry of Beliefs: Christian Traditions in Northern Ireland* (ed. N. Richardson; Belfast: Blackstaff, 1998) p.226.

⁸ Alwyn Thomson, 'Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism', in *A Tapestry of Beliefs: Christian Traditions in Northern Ireland* p.253.

⁹ *Living the Kingdom* (Belfast: The Interchurch Group on Faith and Politics 1989), p.5.

evangelicalism can be seen in that 'it is still possible to detect the resonances and cadences of the Bible in the public discourses of Unionist politicians, whose speeches are heavy with biblical metaphors and allusions.'¹⁰ It was fascinating to listen to someone like the late David Ervine of the Progressive Unionist Party (the political wing of the Ulster Volunteer Force) who spoke like a revivalist evangelical preacher but did so without any religious or theological terminology at all.

8.2 Including ECONI

8.2.1 One of the main political expressions of this new inclusivist evangelical wing in Northern Ireland has been the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland known as ECONI. In that the theological interest of this work has been on ecumenical theology it may seem strange to focus a chapter on a group which is avowedly a sub-group of Protestantism. However, there are a number of reasons that justify the inclusion of a chapter on ECONI. This thesis has sought to examine a broad spectrum of theologies that in their nature sought to be inclusive, to cross boundaries and barriers, and which sought to be ecumenical by wanting to bring people together as a solution against the divisions that exist in Northern Ireland. ECONI is a part of that. The group itself emerged partly as a direct response to the issues raised by the *Faith and Politics Group*. Thus, the analysis of *Breaking Down the Enmity* would be incomplete without looking at *For God and His Glory Alone*, the foundation document of ECONI and *Irish Kairos*. The Declaration of Faith and Commitment, that was largely produced by the Faith and Politics Group after the signing of the Anglo Irish Agreement, was signed by a few evangelicals. Over the years there has continued to be interaction between ECONI and the Faith and Politics Group. For example, *Bridge Builders* is a course run by ECONI as part of their *Transforming Communities* programme. The first part of the course, exploring the nature and extent of sectarianism in the Church and the role of the Church in a divided society, is entitled *The Things that Make for Peace*. This was the title of a document produced by the *Faith and Politics Group* in response to the Republican and Loyalist ceasefires of 1995.

¹⁰ G. Jordan, *Not of this World? Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland*, p.56.

8.2.2 *Evangelical Witness in South Africa*,¹¹ published in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland by the Evangelical Alliance, was an evangelical response to the *Kairos Document* and influenced the authors of *For God and his Glory Alone*. *Irish Kairos* argued that theological categories from South Africa should be used to explicate the situation in Northern Ireland. This suggestion is actually taken up by ECONI and it is important to see how they do this. The group, while not referring to itself as ecumenical, has certainly not attempted to develop a political theology in isolation from Roman Catholicism. Indeed, since the coming to Northern Ireland of the charismatic movement in the early 1970s there has been a number of Roman Catholic, charismatic, evangelicals. A group of them have produced a book examining reconciliation in Northern Ireland from their own point of view.¹² It is clear that political theology in the context of the 'Troubles' cannot be examined without taking into account the work of ECONI.

8.3 For God and His Glory Alone

8.3.1 As ECONI describes itself:

ECONI is a single issue movement. The issue in question is the role of evangelical Christians in our divided community - a single issue, but perhaps the most important one facing us as Christian people in Northern Ireland. ECONI's goal is that all our ideologies should be subjected to the test of the Bible and that our lives should be ordered according to its teaching. ECONI's concern is that this has not always been the case.¹³

8.3.2 An advertisement appeared in the Belfast Telegraph in November 1985, signed by twenty - four Presbyterian ministers. The advertisement was headed *For God and His Glory Alone* with a deliberate contrast drawn with the great Ulster Protestant rallying cry of 'For God and Ulster'. ECONI was formed in 1987 and its first publication was the document *For God and His Glory Alone*, inspired by the 1985

¹¹ *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* by 132 Concerned Evangelicals (London: Evangelical Alliance, 1986).

¹² P. Monaghan, and E. Boyle, (Editors), *Adventures in Reconciliation: Twenty-Nine Catholic Testimonies* (Surrey: Eagle, 1998).

¹³ Alwyn Thomson, *The Fractured Family* (Belfast: ECONI, 1995), p.20.

advertisement, published in September 1988. This document begins with the fundamental inclusivist cry that 'Jesus Christ is Lord'.¹⁴ It then goes on to try and relate what it sees as a number of key biblical principles to the situation in Northern Ireland. These are: love; forgiveness; reconciliation; peace; citizenship; truth; servanthood; justice and righteousness; hope; repentance. In contrast with the *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* document, *For God and His Glory Alone* is very vague, even more so than *Breaking Down the Enmity*. It never addresses any particular issues or case studies in Northern Ireland nor gives any explanation as to how we had got to where we were apart from individual sin. The document set the trend for subsequent ECONI work by being replete with scriptural quotations.

8.4 Citizenship

- 8.4.1 The key concept of *Breaking Down the Enmity* is 'reconciliation', while for *Irish Kairos*, as we shall see, it is 'justice'. In *For God and His Glory Alone* and for much of the subsequent work of ECONI, it is the theme of citizenship that is central. As Morrow says on ECONI, 'particular emphasis has been given to the theme of Christian citizenship'.¹⁵ Indeed a Christian Citizenship Forum was set up in order to give 'a regular safe space for discussion and biblical reflection on a range of issues relevant to the peace process and related civic and political concerns.'¹⁶ The key text that ECONI cites is Matthew 22:21 "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."¹⁷
- 8.4.2 For ECONI, 'Although our true citizenship is in heaven, we are still commanded to be good citizens. Respect for and obedience to government and law is our normal Christian duty.'¹⁸ *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* argues there is an inherent tendency for evangelical theology to be both conservative and legalistic. This means

¹⁴ *For God and His Glory Alone* (Belfast: ECONI 1988) p.5.

¹⁵ John Morrow, 'Christian Reconciliation Movements', in *A Tapestry of Beliefs: Christian Traditions in Northern Ireland* p.284.

¹⁶ ECONI Annual Report 2000 *Thinking Biblically, Building Peace* p.7.

¹⁷ *For God and His Glory Alone* p.11 None of the other two documents we concentrate on cite this biblical reference. The most cited biblical quotation by the contributors of *Faith in Ulster* (Belfast: ECONI 1996) is Matthew 22:21; p.33; p.46; p.112; p.115.

¹⁸ *For God and His Glory Alone* p.11

that evangelicals tend to be sympathetic to the appeal of the apartheid regime to 'law and order'. *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* asks that there be an assessment of 'whether this 'law' and this 'order' is in line with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ or whether they negate the gospel.'¹⁹ They are very clear in the assessment they give, that: 'This to us is the law of Satan and the order of hell. This, in the name of Jesus, we must resist!'²⁰

8.4.3 The responsibility of a government, for ECONI, is to 'restrain and punish evildoers.' As they go on to say, 'In this it is entitled to the support and the involvement of its citizens in the impartial enforcement of the law, in the administration of justice and in the encouragement of law-abiding behaviour and good citizenship.'²¹

8.4.4 Here we have two opposing evangelical analyses of how to be a responsible Christian citizen. The difference of the accounts is the nature of the state which the evangelical is responding to. The South African evangelicals want to respond to the treatment of black people as subhumans who are seen as being less than the image of God as revealed by God's Word.²² The question for ECONI, and Northern Irish Christians more broadly, is thus whether the British state acts or has acted in Northern Ireland in a manner contrary to the Word of God?

If we were commanded by the state to act in a manner contrary to the Word of God, non-violent disobedience would be necessary. But as this situation does not apply in the province at this time, our responsibility as citizens is to submit to the duly constituted government and rule of law²³

8.4.5 The answer in *For God and His Glory Alone* is a clear 'no' (and presumably was still 'no' in March 1989 or February 1994 when the document was reprinted) . We shall see that the answer given in *Irish kairos* is a clear 'yes'. In discussing the relationship between faith and politics, *Breaking Down the Enmity* is clear that there will always

¹⁹ *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* by 132 Concerned Evangelicals, p.23.

²⁰ *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* by 132 Concerned Evangelicals, p.23.

²¹ *For God and His Glory Alone* p.11

²² *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* by 132 Concerned Evangelicals, p.23

²³ *For God and His Glory Alone* p.11

be different political opinions among Christians.²⁴ But they then go on to say: ‘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 e.g. Christian support for Apartheid and Nazism.’²⁵

8.4.6 Many people would support this notion that in perilous times, such as those cited above, issues of right and wrong emerge with clarity and unequivocal stands demand to be taken. However, in relation to Northern Ireland the parameters for acceptable preferences in relation to the ‘Troubles’ are much more blurred for the majority of those within the Irish Churches. Northern Ireland presents political theology with a theological puzzle of degree or kind. If, as we have argued, oppression and discrimination has occurred in Northern Ireland at the behest of the state, but much less than under Nazism and Apartheid, for example, then should the theological response be the same as that to Apartheid and Nazism? Should it differ merely in degree? Or should it be different completely in kind? Neither the *Faith and Politics Group* or ECONI have been prepared to do the political spadework in relation to how much discrimination and oppression has existed in Northern Ireland and the actual nature of the conflict, because it is this allied to a measured theological response that will enable an authentic political theology of the ‘Troubles’ to be developed.

8.5 Religious or Civic Nationalism?

8.5.1 ECONI focuses much of its energy to argue that it is wrong to say that any one country has a privileged position before God and that the Bible posits a particular people or community as special or chosen by God. It believes Scripture is clear:

The people of God are not to be identified with any religious community, not even the Protestant people of Ulster; the people of God are not to be identified with any national group; the land of Northern Ireland is not uniquely special to God. The people of God are those who have faith in Jesus Christ. The people

²⁴ *Breaking Down the Enmity* p.28

²⁵ *Breaking Down the Enmity* p.28

of God are those who have faith in Jesus Christ. The people of God transcend the identity of religious communities and denominations. No nation can claim God's special favour.²⁶

8.5.2 ECONI is clear that there is no particular biblical viewpoint that urges a political preference for Unionism or Nationalism, or represents any party political viewpoint.²⁷ However, it is possible to argue that ECONI is a *de facto* Unionist organisation. The language of ECONI is that the majority opinion has to be respected in Northern Ireland albeit with protection of rights of minorities given.²⁸ Of course, this is a principle of consent that Nationalists would want to qualify and also bring in an all Ireland dimension while ECONI concentrates its analysis purely within Northern Ireland.

8.5.3 Also, there has been a movement away by some Unionists from an ethnic or religious nationalism to a civic nationalism. Religious or ethnic nationalism is when primary loyalty to a nation is identified by ethnic and/or religious characteristics. Civic nationalism is when you understand a nation as a community characterised by equal citizenship and coalescing around shared political values and practices. There have been attempts, with not a great deal of success, to recruit Roman Catholics into the Ulster Unionist Party. The Protestant churches and ECONI are much happier with a civic Unionism which does not depend on religious commitment as opposed to a religious Unionism which is, by its nature, sectarian. This can be seen as either a positive move, as an attempt is made to remove the religious content of politics, or as the Protestant Churches happily distancing themselves from any responsibility for the conflict.

8.6 Social Class

8.6.1 We have seen that one of the criticisms levelled against the Faith and Politics Group from the Roman Catholic working class side has been its middle class bias. A number of evangelical Churches have been successful in attracting the marginalised in the

²⁶ Alwyn Thomson, *The Fractured Family* p.27.

²⁷ *For God and His Glory Alone* p.11; *A Future With Hope - Biblical Frameworks* (Belfast: ECONI 1998), p.6.

²⁸ *A Future With Hope - Biblical Frameworks*, p.16. See also BDE 6.3 Northern Ireland Should Remain as an Administrative Unit p.32.

Protestant community. These Churches have tended to come from the more conservative/fundamentalist wing of evangelicalism. For Jordan, they have been successful 'because the fundamentalist message delivers a degree of certainty and security to lives in which these qualities are otherwise absent.'²⁹ ECONI, as well as the broader new groups of charismatic and inclusivist evangelicals, tend to be middle class which means that when they do speak to the political situation they are speaking to the same audience in social class terms as the Faith and Politics Group. Morrow says of ECONI, 'By targeting their efforts directly at a specific constituency, they have been able to awaken a significant response and self-critique from many, including some significant leaders within Unionism.'³⁰ In terms of the language of community relations in Northern Ireland, what ECONI is doing is largely 'single-identity' work. As *Breaking Down the Enmity* says, 'For there to be one community there must first be two.'³¹

8.7 Ecclesiology

8.7.1 The very nature of evangelical ecclesiology has allowed the ECONI documents and programmes to permeate to the grass roots of Churches in Northern Ireland much more effectively than the *Faith and Politics Group*. There is agreement among evangelicals that the Church functions best not at the level of hierarchies or institutions, but at the level of local congregations and parishes. Thus, the *Faith and Politics Group* has been largely content to produce documents for discussion, largely produced by the great and the good within the four main Churches and leave them in the public domain to trickle down or up. In contrast to this, ECONI has been incredibly active distributing over ten thousand copies of *For God and His Glory Alone* and by 7th November 1993 had developed the first ECONI Sunday. Some fifty five churches representing well over 10,000 Christians involved themselves in this with the aim being to say to their community that:

²⁹ Jordan, *Not of this World? Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland*, p.79.

³⁰ Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation: A Brief Memoir*, p.81.

³¹ BDE 6.2 p.32. We have looked at some of the concerns of the 'two traditions' framework as perhaps tending to ossify prejudice.

i. God has something to say to the community His word is relevant.

ii. God's people are engaging with His word and the hurts facing our community His Church is real.

8.7.2 A quarterly magazine entitled *Lion and Lamb* has been produced which takes a theme such as 'Peace' or 'Justice' and provides another way of disseminating the ideas of ECONI. As well as ECONI Sunday and *Lion and Lamb*, an annual conference has been held with the theme of the November 2004 one being 'biblical faith in a world of difference'. They also developed a Clergy Forum, which provides 'a meeting place for mutual encouragement and exploration of the pastoral implications for ministry that arise from living in a community in conflict.'³²

8.7.3 The further development of ECONI has been threefold. Firstly, the production of new documents. Secondly, the establishment of a Centre for Contemporary Christianity. Thirdly, the establishment of grass roots study programmes and groups.

8.8 Documents

8.8.1 Documents have continued to be produced and there has been a broadening out both of authors and of themes while still wanting to focus on the Bible and keep in line with the original aim of *For God and His Glory Alone*. ECONI has taken what is for Northern Ireland a radical step and brought in theologians and biblical scholars from outside Northern Ireland to help them to reflect on the 'Troubles'. Thus, they got Stanley Hauerwas the theological ethicist to build on previous reflection they had done on reconciliation and published his address to their 1998 conference as *A Time to Heal*.³³ L Gregory Jones, Professor of theology at Duke University, tried to apply his work on forgiveness (based on a study of Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*) to Northern Ireland.³⁴ The following year a group including non-theologians continued the reflection on forgiveness. These were Mark Amstutz, a

³² ECONI Annual Report 2000 *Thinking Biblically, Building Peace* p.7.

³³ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Time to Heal* (Belfast: ECONI 1999).

³⁴ L Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* (Belfast: ECONI 2002).

political scientist; John Brewer, a sociologist; Cecil McCullough, a New Testament scholar (but from outside the evangelical fold) and Duncan Morrow, the Chief Executive of the Community Relations Council (Duncan Morrow is a well known member of the Corrymeela Community, his father is the ex-leader of the community and a member of the Faith and Politics Group).³⁵

8.8.2 The most important publication to come out in ECONI after *For God and His Glory Alone was Beyond Fear, Suspicion and Hostility*.³⁶ This booklet addresses the question of Roman Catholic and evangelical relationships and shows considerable courage by giving more positive models than what is perceived as ‘the dominant evangelical view of Roman Catholicism’, which combines an extreme religious view (evil, satanic) with an extreme political view (the Irish state and Irish nationalism are instruments of Rome).³⁷

8.8.3 McMaster points out that *Beyond Fear, Suspicion and Hostility* ‘does not directly address the resolution of different national and political identities’.³⁸ The conclusions of the document state that ‘Roman Catholics and evangelicals often share common convictions on matters of morality and social justice.’ Some of the examples cited are ‘defending Christians standards of sexual morality, and in opposing the exploitation and manipulation of human life’ and ‘relief and development in the third world.’³⁹ It seems that evangelicals and Roman Catholics can work together on political issues all over the world except in Northern Ireland.

³⁵ Mark Amstutz, John Brewer, Cecil McCullough, Duncan Morrow, *Forgiveness: Making a World of Difference* (Belfast: ECONI 2003).

³⁶ Alwyn Thomson, *Beyond Fear, Suspicion and Hostility* (Belfast: ECONI 1995).

³⁷ Alwyn Thomson, *Beyond Fear, Suspicion and Hostility*, p.7. Thomson gives three models of evangelical - Roman Catholic relationships which are operating among evangelicals in Northern Ireland. **1. A New Era** This is what he calls ‘pragmatic ecumenism’. It recognises the changes that have taken place within Roman Catholicism and it is optimistic about developing new relationships depending on circumstances and situations. **2. Common Concerns** Thomson terms this ‘pragmatic separatism’. The central conviction is that areas of dispute are so important that it is difficult to move closer together. But there are possibilities in certain areas where Roman Catholics and evangelicals can work together. **3. Standing Together** Here the stress is working outside the traditional structures of the churches. Denominations are not churches and what is important is working with someone who has a personal commitment to Christ whatever their background. Ps. 9 and 23.

³⁸ Johnston McMaster, ‘Churches and Politics’, in *A Tapestry of Beliefs: Christian Traditions in Northern Ireland* p.308.

³⁹ Alwyn Thomson, *Beyond Fear, Suspicion and Hostility*, p.27.

8.8.4 In contrast to the work of the Faith and Politics Group, which are avowedly authored by a group, the documents produced by ECONI either have a named author or consist of a series of interviews on a particular issue. The two exceptions to this rule are the initial document *For God and His Glory Alone* which is authored anonymously but commended by some 191 evangelicals and the document *A Future with Hope: Biblical Frameworks for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland (1998)* which is published by the Steering Group of ECONI who are not named in the document. At first glance it would seem that this reflected the individual nature of much evangelical theology and piety and that producing something collectively was alien to them. However, ECONI have stated that this is not the case and that their documents have generally been produced either by their Research Officer (Alwyn Thomson) as part of his job or have been papers presented at ECONI conferences, as in those cited above.

8.9 Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland

8.9.1 Many of their latest documents have been products of the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland. The aim of the Centre, set up in the late 1990s, has been to 'facilitate biblical thinking on a range of concerns in contemporary Ireland.' The aim being 'to provide a context for credible research, informed debate, effective engagement, international exchange, the collation of resources and the nurturing of people and their skills'.⁴⁰ Indeed, the two most recent books published in Northern Ireland on evangelical identity have been the fruit of research projects undertaken in the Centre. These are Glenn Jordan's book *Not of This world?*, which we have cited earlier in the chapter, and Fran Porter's *Changing Women, Changing Worlds: Evangelical Women in Church, Community and Politics*.⁴¹ The founding of this Centre can be seen as the long overdue fulfillment of Recommendation 7 from the 1976 interchurch report on violence which urged 'the setting up of a Christian Centre of Social Investigation which would conduct research into problems underlying social and communal unrest and would monitor continuously progress made in removing the basic grievances of discrimination and injustice within civil society that are related to

⁴⁰ ECONI Annual Report 2000 *Thinking Biblically, Building Peace* p.9.

⁴¹ F. Porter, *Changing Women, Changing Worlds - Evangelical Women in Church, Community and Politics* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2002).

the occurrence of violence.’⁴² It may be a little ironic that the evangelical wing of the Church, which so vehemently opposed the original report on violence, became instrumental in fulfilling one of the major recommendations. From April 2005 ECONI became simply known as the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

8.10 Transforming Communities

8.10.1 From the beginning, the focus of ECONI has been to develop grass roots programmes to facilitate discussion, debate and transformation. ‘Action Packs’ were produced from *God and His Glory Alone*, to encourage further study of each of the biblical themes examined in the document. If we look through the courses offered we can see a movement taking place from reflection to transformation. A Certificate in Biblical Peacemaking is offered and within that there is an introductory course entitled ‘Journey in Understanding’ which focuses on the interaction of culture, history, politics and religion in shaping communities and faith. ‘Bridge Builders’ tries to get people to be community bridge builders by exploring themes of peacebuilding, conflict, identity and examining the role of the church in a divided community. In the most recent course ‘Transforming Communities’, the stress has been most clearly on helping Christians to reflect biblically but also to live authentically and make peace in a divided society. In a major way the evolution of its courses reflects the journey of ECONI as a whole.

8.11 Conclusion - The Same Yesterday, Today and Forever?

8.11.1 It is clear that ECONI has come a long way from 1987. However, little has changed in terms of ECONI’s theological response to the ‘Troubles’. The consistently difficult thing about ECONI has been in pinning down concrete theological and political reflection of the Northern Irish context. The only concrete contextual examples that it provides are examples of religious nationalism (of the Protestant kind) in order to critique them.⁴³ When ECONI looks at other issues in relation to the theology of the

⁴² See Appendix One.

⁴³ Alwyn Thomson, *The Fractured Family* p.24.

‘Troubles’ and has an opportunity to ground its theology in the realities of the Northern Irish situation it singularly refuses to do so.

8.11.2 There may be a question of theological methodology here. ECONI has sought to identify biblical principles relevant to a Christian response to the conflict in the north. The avowed aim of ECONI is to enable evangelicals to relate ‘biblical theology to the specific context of life in Northern Ireland.’⁴⁴ So, theologically their decision is to begin with the Bible, then go on to apply ‘theological and moral imperatives.’⁴⁵ Of course, while claiming to begin with the Bible, it is a truism that they do begin with the Northern Irish context because that shapes the particular questions that they bring to the biblical text.

8.11.3 For example, in *A Future With Hope*, they look at things like Culture and Identity, Land and Nationality, Consent and Participation, Rights and Responsibility, Equality and Social Justice, Justice and Mercy, Truth and Trust, and Forgiveness and Healing. Now these are obviously questions that have arisen from the political context of Northern Ireland, and may it well be useful to find biblical principles that say something about them, so long as you there is a return to the context and an attempt to apply the principles and ideas found in the Bible. There seems to be a fear of returning to the context again, even though that would be the exciting and useful part of what they are trying to do theologically, but it never happens. When ECONI wants to get immersed in the Northern Irish context they use the medium of a number of personal reflections on a theme. So the ECONI publication *Faith in Ulster* [1996] brings together fifty personal responses to the question ‘What does *For God and Ulster* mean to you?’ While *The Great White Tent* [1999] has twenty five Nationalists express what they think of Unionists. To combine *A Future With Hope* with *Faith in Ulster* would be starting to build a concrete political theology. A discreet distance is always kept between theology and context. So everything is done with very broad brush strokes with perhaps the hope that in ECONI courses and grass roots initiatives the theology will come contextually alive and be fleshed out.

⁴⁴ *A Future With Hope - Biblical Frameworks*, p.23. Of course questions remain between competing theological viewpoints within the canon of scripture. For example the theologies of Jonah and Ruth contrasting with Ezra and Nehemiah or Paul against James.

⁴⁵ *A Future With Hope - Biblical Frameworks*, p.23.

However, ECONI may take a different route but it still ends up with “Whatever you say, say nothing”.

8.11.4 In contrast, the Faith and Politics Group is very clearly involved in the business of developing a contextual theology of the troubles in Northern Ireland. By reading the documents they have produced since *Breaking Down the Enmity*, as we have said, one could trace the contours, the issues and the debates of the Northern Ireland problem for the past twenty years. Despite a number of public statements which have been made by ECONI in relation to things like the Downing Street Declaration and the Loyalist and IRA ceasefires, it would be much more difficult to find your way around the ‘Troubles’ through the medium of the documents of ECONI. Through the ecumenical nature of the Faith and Politics Group there is a flexibility of approach when they tackle a subject. We have noticed the copious quoting of scripture by ECONI, while the Faith and Politics Group’s document *Remembering Our Past: 1690 and 1916* (produced in 1991) does not quote at all from scripture. *New Pathways* (1997) quotes once from the Bible, while *Breaking Down the Enmity* quotes some twenty six times.

8.11.5 The paradox of ecumenical relationships in Northern Ireland was how the ‘Troubles’ pushed the Churches closer to one another, but at the price of failing to address the causes of the conflict in order to preserve a united front at all costs. It does seem that a version of ‘the paradox of ecumenical relationships’ does apply to ECONI as well. ECONI wants to keep as broad a coalition of evangelicals together as possible.⁴⁶ How is a political theology created and yet a fragile coalition kept together? The initial answer of the mainstream Churches was to address all the issues which divided them (Ministry, Mary, the Eucharist) except that which was truly divisive, the question of the legitimacy of the state. The approach of the ecumenical groups has been to posit a theology of reconciliation, which in content is laudable, but in action the justice dimension of reconciliation is left out in order to facilitate continuing Protestant involvement. The lack of political analyses and proposals is partly due to the theological straitjacket which ECONI has (willingly) put on itself, but both in 1969 with the Churches, and more recently by ECONI, both are examples of theologies of

⁴⁶ *A Future With Hope - Biblical Frameworks*, p.6.

avoidance. Looking at everything ECONI has done, it might seem obscene to say that they are anything less than completely engaged in facilitating political reflection and theology. But like the Faith and Politics Group they have not examined how the state actually behaved both pre-and post- 'Troubles'. Without that rootedness allied to theological reflection which then creates the political theology that reflects all aspects of the situation in Northern Ireland, avoidance is exactly what ECONI is about.

CHAPTER NINE

IRISH KAIROS

9.1 Introduction

- 9.1.1 The earliest and most substantial critical response to *Breaking Down the Enmity* in 1985-1986 came from a group, both northerners and southerners, based around the Student Christian Movement in Ireland. Michael Ritchie, the Northern Irish Secretary of SCM from 1983-1987, edited their reply.¹ In their introduction they set out clearly the aim of their writing, 'What we want to do is to look at the kind of theology which operates in Northern Ireland.'²
- 9.1.2 The reason they wanted to do this is because the way theology is used for them provides an important snapshot of the wider situation. From that they argue that there has been a stagnation of both the theological and political language used in relation to the 'Troubles' with little that is new having been created.³ The point is made that the overarching theology of the 'Troubles' has become what they term as the 'theology of the latest atrocity'. The reasoning behind this is their argument that the 'Troubles' were a shock for the Churches. Throughout the 1960s, post Vatican II, things seemed to be going very well; as they state: 'Inter-communal harmony seemed to be flourishing; the days of hatred and riots and the feelings of bitterness seemed banished to an irrelevant periphery. There was no need to delve deeply into an analysis of unresolved contradictions.'⁴
- 9.1.3 When the 'Troubles' came the Churches and clergy were unprepared and they were suddenly having to officiate at the funerals of victims. 'And funerals are

¹ Unpublished document. I will refer to this document as: *Irish Kairos*.

² *Irish Kairos* p.1.

³ *Irish Kairos* pp.1-2.

⁴ *Irish Kairos* p.2.

not the place to reflect deeply on the causes of untimely death. Thus the 'theology of the latest atrocity' tended to be all about condemning a particular form of violence and little to do with or say about anything else.'⁵

9.2 Coasters

9.2.1 The framework which is used for this analysis that the 'Troubles' provided a massive shock to the system for the Churches, and indeed wider society, is provided by John Hewitt's poem *The Coasters*. John Hewitt was known as the 'Ulster Protestant' or 'planter' poet. Though brought up as a Methodist, Hewitt was an avowed agnostic. In his more political writing he explores his Protestant/Irish/British identity through a commitment to both regionalism and socialism.⁶ Hewitt's poetic response to the outbreak of sectarian strife in 1968-1969 was the booklet *An Ulster Reckoning*.⁷ In the foreword, Hewitt speaks of the shattering of his view, which had grown throughout the fifties and sixties, that '...an apparent softening of the hard lines and a growing tolerance between the two historic communities pointed towards a more mature and responsible society.'⁸

9.2.2 In *The Coasters*, Hewitt points his accusing finger at the superficial liberalism of the bourgeoisie as well as their complacency. Two refrains are repeated throughout the poem 'You coasted along' and 'Relations were improving'. Contrary to the picture espoused by the Churches, the bourgeoisie and indeed Hewitt himself; 'the old lies festered', 'and the sores suppurred and spread'. The reality which struck home with full force in 1969 was:

⁵ *Irish Kairos* p.2.

⁶ It was part of Hewitt's vision that regional loyalties might transcend sectarian division in Northern Ireland and that the Protestant majority in the north would come to realise themselves 'for the first time, not Britain's pensioners or stranded Englishmen and Scots, being instead a group living long enough in Ireland to have the air in their blood, the landscape in their bones, and their history in their hearts, and so, a special kind of Irish themselves, they could with grace make the transition to federal unity' (draft of a letter to John Montague, spring 1964), with the Republic of Ireland, as well as with the other main regions of the British Isles. P.li Introduction by Frank Ormsby in Frank Ormsby (editor), *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (Blackstaff:Belfast, 1992).

⁷ *An Ulster Reckoning* was published privately in 1971. The poems along with the foreword are contained in). Ormsby (editor), *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* .

⁸ Ormsby (editor), *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* p.593.

Now the fever is high and raging;
who would have guessed it, coasting along?
The ignorant-sick thresh about in delirium
and tear at the scabs with dirty fingernails.
The cloud of infection hangs over the city,
a quick change of the wind and it
might spill over the leafy suburbs.
You coasted too long.⁹

The *Irish Kairos* document tells us that: ‘In a word, we were “coasting” and eventually we coasted into a brick wall which collapsed around our ears.’¹⁰

9.2.3 The analysis of the document here, using *The Coasters*, as a tool to analyse the Churches response to the troubles, coalesces with what has earlier been characterised as the ‘ecumenical paradox’ of the troubles. After 1969 the Churches continued with Hewitt’s ‘Relations are Improving’ mantra which was true in all the areas which the Churches examined together; but this was really a self-fulfilling prophecy. There was a consistent refusal by the Churches to address the issue which they feared would divide them as it divided the communities: the ‘Troubles’.

9.2.4 The accusation of the document is that it was not simply the case that the Churches coasted in 1969 but that in fact that they are continuing to do so some eighteen years later.¹¹ The ‘theology of the latest atrocity’ with its condemnation of violence allows the Churches to have a clear conscience that ‘something is being done’; while at the same time, it allows an avoidance of the issues raised by those who espouse the violence. The great fear of the bourgeois in Hewitt’s poem is that they will become infected by the violence and hatred, ‘a quick change of the wind and it might spill over the leafy

⁹ Ormsby (editor), *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* pp.135-137.

¹⁰ *Irish Kairos* p.2.

¹¹ *Irish Kairos* p.2.

suburbs'. The document argues that the primary concern of the Churches has been to keep the violence at arms length. They pose the question: 'In the absence of anything else which seems to make any difference, will the Christians of Northern Ireland still be condemning violence while being relatively untouched by it?'¹²

9.3 A New Approach?

9.3.1 The response of the document to the situation they have characterised in order to 'make any difference' is an attempt to provide a new way of categorising the varying theologies that had been produced in response to the conflict. Their argument is that any previous attempt to look at the situation in Northern Ireland in theological terms has done so by using the traditional spectrum of Roman Catholicism through to Protestantism. As this broadly reflects the split between the two communities, it has seemed the obvious lens to look through. The aim of trying to provide a different characterisation here is to both push forward our understanding of the 'Troubles' and to allow Christians to contribute more decisively to their solution.¹³

9.3.2 However, the document misses a major point here by failing to notice or acknowledge that a difference, or breakthrough, in the approach of *Breaking Down the Enmity* is that in fact it does not examine the Northern Ireland conflict from the perspective of denominational allegiance. Though *Irish Kairos* does acknowledge that, 'The most positive Christian response has been to suggest that this spectrum is not quite as important as we have been led to believe.'¹⁴

9.3.3 When *Breaking Down the Enmity* outlines fears and resentments it does look at the communities separately.¹⁵ Yet, as the fears and resentments are different in each community it seems natural to take this approach. However, when it

¹² *Irish Kairos* p.3.

¹³ *Irish Kairos* p.3.

¹⁴ *Irish Kairos* p.3.

¹⁵ BDE pp.7-10.

comes to the theological analysis of the document the theology is all done in an ecumenical context. Section two of the document examines the theme of 'The Scriptures, Conflict and Reconciliation', Section three looks at 'Implications for the Irish Churches', Section four is on 'Faith and Politics', while Section five is entitled 'Christian Criteria for Politics in Ireland'. Indeed they sum up their programme by saying,

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, judgments and actions which do not respond to the conditions 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 the social and cultural;
- to follow up the social consequences of theological and doctrinal differences and attempt to ease some of them;
- to worship together;
- to co-operate on projects for the common good.¹⁶

9.3.4 So, in terms of characterising theology beyond the Protestant and Catholic spectrum *Irish Kairos* is not doing a new thing here. It was done before, though in their use of the *South African Kairos Document* they do it in a fresh and original way. Theology operates at different levels and places within Northern Ireland. The *Drumcree Faith and Justice Group* has pointed out the issue of class in its response to *Breaking Down the Enmity*. Even within a small place like Northern Ireland, geographical location is important for political theology. For example, there is a clear split within the loyalist paramilitaries between country and city, when their views are examined. Those from Belfast speak in much more secular, socialist tones while those from the country areas speak more using the discourse of Protestant

¹⁶ BDE p.19.

fundamentalism. The opportunity which *Irish Kairos* has perhaps missed in this section is a focus on the part that the locus for theological reflection, such as class and location, plays in the subsequent theology which is produced in Northern Ireland.

9.4 Excursion on Method

9.4.1 It is somewhat commonplace now to assert that the social reality which a theologian comes out of will affect the self-understanding of the theologian; and to a greater or lesser degree will determine the theology which is produced. David Tracy speaks of three distinct and related social realities for contemporary theology: the wider society, the academy and the Church.¹⁷ He wants to say that even if we do not posit a crude cause and effect from social reality to theology, nonetheless he believes that social location provides, what he terms, “elective affinities” for a certain emphasis in theology and indeed what actually counts, or does not count, as a theological statement.¹⁸

9.4.2 Tracy focuses on the theology produced by individual theologians. Liberation theology urges that we examine the social reality underlying types of theology that are produced. Thus Leonardo Boff stresses that all theology and theologies need to be subjected to ideological critique.¹⁹ Gutierrez, giving content to the views of Boff paints a broad picture of how the distinctive social setting and audience of liberation theology provides a juxtaposition between it and most European and North American theologies, located as they are almost overwhelmingly in academy and Church. Gutierrez sees the two theologies as responding to different interlocutors. What he terms northern hemisphere theology responds to questions posed by non-believers, while in the situation in which Gutierrez lives and theologises the questions for theology are posed

¹⁷ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination-Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM, 1981) p.5. He goes on to say: ‘These social realities are not, of course, simply peculiar to contemporary theology. Consider, for example, the import of the episcopal setting for the theologies of Ireneus and Augustine, the “academy” setting for Clement and Origen, the monastic setting of Bernard of Clairvaux, or the university setting of Abelard and Thomas Aquinas. p.33.

¹⁸ *The Analogical Imagination-Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* p.5.

¹⁹ Leonardo Boff, *Jesus the Liberator* (London: SPCK, 1980), p.265.

by those he calls 'non-persons', in the sense that they are treated as such by those in power.

The poor, the wretched of the earth, are not, in the first instance, questioning the religious world or its philosophical presuppositions. They are calling into question first of all the economic, social, and political order that oppresses and marginalises them, and of course the ideology that is brought in to justify this domination.²⁰

As Rowland states, 'Perhaps this is the most disturbing thing about the theological tradition which liberation theology represents: that there exists a hermeneutical privilege for the poor and marginalised and a consequent loss of privilege and status in academy or church.'²¹

9.4.3 As we try and understand the importance of context for theologising in Northern Ireland, the additional contribution of black theology to the stress on understanding context as an epistemological key for unlocking the theology which is produced is vital. Black theology gleans from Liberation theology the idea that theological discourse is fundamentally contextual in character. James Cone especially, builds on this by arguing that as well as being contextual all theological speech is symbolic. For Cone, to speak correctly about God and to rightly understand the nature of theological language we can only speak through the mediation of symbols. Cone is quite open that he takes this idea of symbol from the philosophical theology of Paul Tillich: 'To speak of Black Theology is to speak with the Tillichian understanding of symbol in mind.'²²

²⁰ Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (London: SCM, 1983), p.191.

²¹ Christopher Rowland, 'Introduction: the theology of liberation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (ed. Christopher Rowland; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.12.

²² J. H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20th Anniversary edn (New York, Orbis Books, 1990), p.7. Tillich's views of theology as symbolic language are spread across the second and third volumes of his *Systematic Theology*. For a critical discussion of the dependence by Cone on the use by Tillich of the concept of 'symbol' Cf. Theo Witvleit, *The Way of the Black Messiah* (London, SCM Press, 1987), pp. 173-7. Also, B.R. James, 'A Tillichian Analysis of James Cone's Black Theology', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* I (I) (Spring 1974), pp. 27-38.

9.4.4 Edward Antonio in his essay on Cone says that he uses this concept for a particular reason. 'By so fastening on to the symbolic character of theological language, Cone is enabled to appropriate blackness as a theological Topos.'²³ The purpose of doing this is that: 'It is this symbolism, with regard to both its historical as well as its present function(s), that Black Theology has appropriated in order to enunciate the historical possibilities for the self-affirmation and/or negation of the black subject.'²⁴ The idea of blackness is terribly important for black theologians because of what it can symbolise in terms of moral significance, marking the difference between evil and good.

9.4.5 Theological language in Northern Ireland is both contextual and symbolic. In *Breaking Down the Enmity*, the response provided by *For God and His Glory Alone* and *Irish Kairos*, theological language operates exclusively on a surface level of factual statements. Yet, we have seen with atonement and covenant how the multilayered nature of theological discourse has meant that concepts symbolise different things for the different communities. The difficulty for ecumenical theology is being able to produce a theology or theologies that are both contextual and symbolic for Northern Ireland.

9.5 Locus

9.5.1 In wanting to see themselves as positing a new way of classifying theological responses to the troubles, *Irish Kairos* misses the importance, in the context of Northern Ireland, that the locus for theological reflection of *Breaking Down the Enmity* is the Churches. We have seen that *Breaking Down the Enmity* represents a voice, overwhelmingly male and clerical in relation to the 'Troubles'. This is important for understanding the theology that they produce.

9.5.2 The study by Inge Radford produced for the Community Relations Council, the Belfast Churchgoers Survey and the research of Duncan Morrow all have provided similar, and not terribly surprising conclusions, that the churches are

²³ Edward Antonio, 'Black Theology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (ed. Christopher Rowland; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.71.

²⁴ Antonio, 'Black Theology', p.71.

bastions both of conservativeness and caution in relation to both politics and theology.²⁵ What is interesting is the view in the surveys that a significant religious division in Northern Ireland is not just that between Roman Catholic and Protestant, but between those, especially on the Protestant side, who are open towards the other community and those who want little or no contact. As we have mentioned previously, there is broad support for contact at the purely religious level, but this support diminishes considerably when it comes to contact matters outside the remit of what are seen as 'Churchy' activities. Then the ecumenical consensus collapses.

9.5.3 In Northern Ireland there has been little ecumenism from below. If one adds the prejudice that exists within congregations, to the fact that Irish Churches in terms of numbers and influence still find themselves in a relatively strong position vis-a-vis their British counterparts, there is no sense of Churches being forced together through falling numbers and diminishing influence. Issues of ecumenism are irrelevant to most people because they do not affect their daily and weekly involvement in their local Church. The vast majority of ecumenism which has gone on has been the preserve of both the Church leaders and the official ecumenical bodies. Both Morrow and Radford continually point out that when there is any local ecumenical contact it is almost overwhelmingly the preserve of the clergy, with a strong desire not to address anything too controversial, e.g., 'politics'.

9.5.4 This division between those who are 'ecumenically minded' and those who are not is most apparent in the Irish Presbyterian Church. 'During the period of the 'Troubles' these divisions have been particularly marked within Irish Presbyterianism, although by no means exclusively so.'²⁶ In 1980, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland withdrew from the World Council of Churches

²⁵ Inge Radford, *Breaking Down Divisions: The Possibilities of a Local Church Contribution to Improving Community Relations* (Belfast: NI Community Relations Council, 1993). F.W.Boal, M.Keane, & D.N.Livingstone, *Them and Us? Attitudinal Variation among Churchgoers in Belfast* (Belfast: Queen's University Institute of Irish Studies, 1997). Duncan Morrow, *The Churches and Inter-Community Relationships* (Coleraine: University of Ulster Centre for the Study of Conflict, 1991).

²⁶ Norman Richardson (editor), *A Tapestry of Beliefs: Christian Traditions in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press 1998), p.11.

ostensibly over the support given by the Programme to Combat Racism's support for Liberation Movements. While in 1989, a further decision was made not to join the new Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, the successor to the British Council of Churches.²⁷ The reason why problems with ecumenical involvement have been peculiarly marked within Presbyterianism is due to the top down model of ecumenism which has predominated in Northern Ireland. As the most democratic of the four 'main' churches, Presbyterian ministers and Church structures find it more difficult to be involved ecumenically without the approval of their members. Dunlop puts it thus:

No one can appoint a Presbyterian minister to a congregation. The congregation has the responsibility of making the choice and, provided the procedures are properly followed, the presbytery will then install the minister who is the choice of the people and has received their call. The process is overseen by the presbytery but not controlled by it. This system inculcates in people the conviction that they have the right to be consulted in matters which concern them. Therein lies the seeds of democracy.²⁸

9.5.5 Here is a further 'ecumenical paradox' that when ecumenism has been trying to promote democracy, especially in terms of asking the paramilitaries to listen to the vast majority of the Irish people and to cease violence, it has been by its nature anti-democratic in not reflecting the views of its own constituency, if we see its constituency as the Church as a whole rather than the powerful ecumenical minority in the Church which it does represent. Furthermore, if ecumenism was to be democratic then it may not exist at all, or it would certainly not have had the powerful voice home and abroad which it has had.

9.5.6 The retort to all this from all those ecumenically involved would presumably

²⁷ Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging: Presbyterians and the Conflict in Ireland*, p.16.

²⁸ Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging: Presbyterians and the Conflict in Ireland*, p.12.

be that ecumenism has been a type of prophetic action speaking the word of the Lord in a difficult situation with out fear or favour. This was indeed sometimes the case. Yet alongside this is the sense that Northern Irish ecumenism has been about setting acceptable parameters for debate and control by those involved in it within the leadership of the Churches. Norman Richardson comments on integrated education, which was broadly the cause of the articulate, ecumenical middle classes within the Churches:

The movement to promote integrated education, in its origins very much a lay Christian movement, has often been regarded with great suspicion (to the point of hostility) by some in leadership positions in the Churches, perhaps because it is one aspect of education which seems significantly beyond their control.²⁹

If some in the Church leadership finds it difficult to relate to this group, how can there be an understanding of and a relation to those in the poorer communities of Northern Ireland who are supporting paramilitaries on either side?

9.5.7 *Breaking Down the Enmity* refers to the fact that:

At present large parts of our churches are captive to the political ideologies of Unionism and Nationalism to such a degree that they are unable to make a clear distinction between commitment to their faith and commitment to a particular political point of view.³⁰

Here *Breaking Down the Enmity* subjects certain types of political theology to both the ideological critique of Boff and the 'elective affinities' of Tracey. By characterising the context out of which *Breaking Down the Enmity* emerged, it is clear that these same criteria need to be applied to this particular group within the Church in order to see if they 'make a clear

²⁹ Norman Richardson (editor), *A Tapestry of Beliefs: Christian Traditions in Northern Ireland*, p.13.

³⁰ BDE p.18.

distinction between commitment to their faith and commitment to a particular political point of view.’³¹

This philosophy of oppression, perfected and refined through civilizations as a true culture of injustice, does not achieve its greatest triumph when its propagandists knowingly inculcate it; rather the triumph is achieved when this philosophy has become so deeply rooted in the spirits of the oppressors themselves and their ideologues that they are not even aware of their guilt.³²

9.6 Three Theologies

9.6.1 *Irish Kairos* tries to give us theological tools to examine Northern Irish political theology. Particularly and for the first time, they want to question the ecumenical theology produced by the Churches (represented by *Breaking Down the Enmity*), which is seen as being the brightest, best and most hopeful that Northern Ireland has to offer. The paradigm they use to explicate theological reflection in Northern Ireland in relation to the ‘Troubles’ is the *Kairos Document* from South Africa produced in 1985. They pay special attention to the *Kairos Document’s* elucidation of three basic categories of political theology which operate in a situation of conflict.³³

9.7 Status Quo Theology

9.7.1 ‘Status Quo Theology’, also referred to as ‘partition theology’, provides the equivalent theological category to the ‘State Theology’ of the *Kairos Document*.³⁴ The term status quo is taken from the *Kairos Document* when it says that:

³¹ BDE p.7 the fears of the communities are classified under: religion, politics, culture and economics.

³² J. Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (London: SCM, 1979) p.xi.

³³ For the text of the *Kairos Document*, subsequent international responses and a theological analysis, see: R.McAfee Brown, *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

³⁴ *Irish Kairos* pp.8-13. *Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in*

‘State Theology’ is simply the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonizes the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy.³⁵

‘State theology’ has tried to re-establish the status quo of orderly discrimination, exploitation and oppression by appealing to the consciences of its citizens in the name of law and order.³⁶

For *Irish Kairos* the decisive event of the twentieth century, in terms of the dominance of a certain model of political theology, has been partition which created a ‘Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people’ in the North and enshrined the Roman Catholic Church in a special position in the South.³⁷

9.7.2 This use of partition as the ‘primary event’ for Irish political theology points to the difficulty in using the term ‘state theology’, as the Kairos document does, simply because they want to use terminology which applies to more than one state as the Irish Churches organise on an all Ireland basis.³⁸ Therefore, they settle on the term ‘Partition’ or ‘Status Quo’ theology as being more appropriate for the Northern Irish situation.

9.7.3 The document goes on to outline what it terms ‘the most obvious aspects’ of ‘Status Quo’ theology.³⁹ 1) Clear loyalty to the state; 2) Status Quo Theology

South Africa, The Kairos Document (Published in UK by Catholic Institute for International Relations and the British Council of Churches) pp.6-10. Subsequently referred to as *The Kairos Document*.

³⁵ *The Kairos Document* p.6

³⁶ *The Kairos Document* p.8.

³⁷ *Irish Kairos* p.8. Famously the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Lord Craigavon, referred to a “Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people” *Northern Ireland House of Commons Debates*, vol.16, col. 1090, 24 Apr. 1934, which was a statement mirrored by De Valera (the Irish Prime Minister) on 17th March 1935 that ‘since the coming of St. Patrick, fifteen hundred years ago, Ireland has been a Christian and Catholic nation. All the ruthless attempts made through the centuries to force her from this allegiance have not shaken her faith. She remains a Catholic Nation.’ In a radio broadcast to the United States. *The Irish Press*, March 18 1935.

³⁸ *Irish Kairos* p.8.

³⁹ *Irish Kairos* p.8.

as the means of passing on the faith; 3) The question of power. The argument is that those who hold this kind of theology see a holy authority in the state as it is.⁴⁰ Duncan Forrester terms this type of political theology as ‘Eusebian Political Theology’.⁴¹ While McCaughey develops a political theology specifically for Ireland and gives a parallel concept to the status quo theology of *Irish Kairos* terming it ‘priestly’ in that it is concerned primarily with the continuing life of the institutions of the churches, along with their prestige and place in society.⁴² Forrester points out that the state theology which the Kairos document criticises in South Africa is an extreme case, while even more culpable instances, such as the ‘German Christians’ support for Hitler, can be found in modern times. He says that the danger of this type of political theology is that:

Like any other system of ideas, theology can easily be sucked into becoming little more than an ideology justifying the ways of the powerful to themselves and to those without power, Christian on the surface, but in substance and effect pure ‘civil theology’ with a thin quoting of Christian rhetoric.⁴³

9.7.4 We have discussed earlier the question of the locus for theological reflection in Northern Ireland. Forrester asserts that state theology provides a particular locus for theological reflection in that it is done close to the powerful and experts and within the corridors of power. At its best it is ‘addressed constructively to the decision makers’.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Irish Kairos* p.8.

⁴¹ Forrester, *Theology and Politics* pp21-23 and 160-163

⁴² McCaughey *Memory & Redemption Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland* p.134

⁴³ Forrester, *Theology and Politics* p.163

⁴⁴ Forrester, *Theology and Politics* p.163

9.8 A Good Influence?

- 9.8.1 The question of the use of the concept of 'state theology' in relation to the situation in Northern Ireland is then not simply one of whether or not it exists or has existed there and is thus wrong *per se*. Rather the debate is whether state theology has been or is a negative or positive influence. Has it spoken truth to those in power? Or, like in South Africa, has it blessed injustice, canonised the will of the powerful and reduced the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy? Has it misused theological concepts and biblical texts for its own political purposes?
- 9.8.2 The answer in *Irish Kairos* to this question is a resounding 'yes'. It argues that the Churches have engaged in 'little debate about the effectiveness of the State in its handling of power'.⁴⁵ Adjectives such as 'stark' and 'appalling' are used to describe the social order in Northern Ireland.⁴⁶ In fact, the whole issue of the legitimacy of the Northern Irish state is raised. *Irish Kairos* see itself as standing in a Christian tradition which characterises a state as legitimate if it is seen to protect the common good. Throughout the document a number of issues are raised which for them provide serious doubts as to whether or not the Northern Irish state can be seen to do this.⁴⁷ In broader terms, the difficulty they have with the state in Northern Ireland involves the unequal spread of power, wealth and status.⁴⁸ More specifically they identify employment practices, housing policies and security legislation as being part of the roots which breed prejudice and sectarianism.⁴⁹ While elsewhere in the document issues such as widespread poverty, unemployment, urban deprivation, non-jury courts, sectarian killings, state violence against civilians, strip searching of prisoners and other degrading treatment, intimidation of large numbers of people out of their homes, murder of

⁴⁵ *Irish Kairos* p.9.

⁴⁶ *Irish Kairos* p.9

⁴⁷ *Irish Kairos* p.9

⁴⁸ *Irish Kairos* p.4

⁴⁹ *Irish Kairos* p.4

policemen and members of the judiciary and protection rackets.⁵⁰ They conclude,

‘It is indeed arguable whether the state has much claim to legitimacy by those on the receiving end of the poverty and unemployment and abuse of power’.⁵¹

9.9 A Question of Power

9.9.1 As well as criticising the exercise of power by the state in relation to Northern Ireland, unlike *Breaking Down the Enmity* the authors of *Irish Kairos* also provide a critique of the internal power structures of the Churches and point to a symbiotic relationship between this and the state.

The third aspect of Status Quo Theology is the correspondence between the way power is exercised in the Churches and in the states North and South. In both, power whether spiritual or temporal is held by a very small number of people.⁵²

9.9.2 Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland with their hierarchical nature are cited as obviously mirroring the states in Ireland North and South. The structures in the other Protestant Churches, especially the Presbyterian Church which has the strongest democratic tradition, are viewed somewhat more ambiguously in terms of their participatory and democratic credentials. Nonetheless, the conclusion is that: ‘There is however only the semblance of real democracy and the structure is more of an oligarchy than a truly participatory system.’⁵³

⁵⁰ *Irish Kairos* p.9

⁵¹ *Irish Kairos* p.9

⁵² *Irish Kairos* p.10.

⁵³ *Irish Kairos* p.11

9.9.3 A similar sentiment is expressed by the Irish Presbyterian author McCaughey when comparing the structures of the Irish Protestant Churches to those of the Roman Catholic Church he says:

The structures of the Protestant churches in Ireland at first appear to be a good deal more democratic. The General Synod of the Church of Ireland has two lay members for every clergy person, and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church is made up of equal numbers of ministers and elders. However, this is not always as good as it looks. First of all, the only lay persons likely to be able to afford to take a week off to attend meetings of Synod, Assembly or the Methodist Conference will tend to be retired, comfortably off, self-employed, or perhaps very occasionally unemployed. The overwhelming majority are middle class which is probably unavoidable, but it is a pity, and repeatedly it shows up in the wording and the underlying prejudices in many of the speeches made and resolutions passed.⁵⁴

9.9.4 The Brazilian Presbyterian theologian Rubem Alves sees these characteristics, which *Irish Kairos* and McCaughey cite in relation to Irish Protestantism, as appearing within Protestantism as a whole. He speaks of a tendency to set up control mechanisms within the institution with the purpose of getting rid of any conduct or thought which is construed to be deviant. The net result of this is an absence of any sort of prophetic criticism allied with a legitimisation of the established political status quo.⁵⁵ The conclusion of *Irish Kairos* in this section is that the Irish Churches 'have taken on the values of the state by having legitimised it so strongly.'⁵⁶

⁵⁴ McCaughey *Memory & Redemption Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland* p.143

⁵⁵ Rubem Alves, *Protestantism and Repression* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

⁵⁶ *Irish Kairos* p.11.

9.10 Romans

9.10.1 The biblical justification for this theological position, as in the *Kairos*

Document, is seen as being Romans 13:1-7.⁵⁷ However, this seems merely to have been lifted from the *Kairos Document* and no examples are given as to how this text has been used within Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic in this way. Neither is any context or exegesis of Romans 13 given, ignoring the explicit instructions of the *Kairos Document*. In relation to the use of scripture, the *Kairos Document* points out that scripture must be interpreted in its context. Otherwise, 'To abstract a text from its context and to interpret it in the abstract is to distort the meaning of God's Word.'⁵⁸

9.10.2 Indeed in terms of this text being openly quoted in Ireland the examples are reasonably few; either before or after *Irish Kairos* was written. *Breaking Down the Enmity* uses it once; quoting Romans 13.1.⁵⁹ In *For God and His Glory Alone*, after citing Romans 13:1-7, they state: 'Although our true citizenship is in heaven, we are still commanded to be good citizens. Respect for and obedience to government and law is our normal Christian duty.'⁶⁰ One of the most fascinating examples came from the response of the Roman Catholic Church to the IRA campaign of the 1950s. In a statement read at all masses in January 1956 they outlined their position on the use of force on the basis of Romans 13 stating that: 'Sacred scripture gives the right to bear the sword and to use it against evil doers to the supreme authority, and to it alone.'⁶¹ For McMaster writing a Bible study guide on the Peace Process, Romans 13 is, 'used as an argument for submission to governmental authority in every

⁵⁷ *Irish Kairos* p.9

⁵⁸ *The Kairos Document* p.7.

⁵⁹ BDE p.26.

⁶⁰ *For God and His Glory Alone* p.11

⁶¹ Quoted in O.P.Rafferty *Catholicism in Ulster 1603-1983: An Interpretative History* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1994), p.251

circumstance.’⁶² Kinahan, examining Protestants and the future of Northern Ireland, after quoting Romans 13:1-2, he adds:

We should make two points at this stage of our argument. Firstly, just because Paul says that we should obey the state authorities, does not mean that he was an active supporter of those same authorities. Secondly, Paul was an evangelist, with his own specific concerns; we cannot therefore say that, just because Paul accepted the *status quo*, perhaps reluctantly, that we in our different situations with our different roles in church and society must necessarily take the same attitude as he did.⁶³

9.10.3 Lascaris, examining what the nature of a state is, looks at both Romans 13 and Revelation 13 as constituting opposing views of the state, though the two dominant texts he cites and examines are John 18:33-40 and Mark 12:13-17. In terms of Romans 13.1-7, he says ‘it has created great problems. It gave an apparent biblical rationale for people not to resist the Hitler regime.’⁶⁴ Thomson, from ECONI, quotes Romans 13 twice. Once when he is speaking about the views of Ulster Protestants that from Romans 13 they get the idea that the main purpose of the state is to punish evildoers: ‘So a Government that in pursuit of political agreement releases prisoners is setting aside its God-given responsibility to govern.’⁶⁵ Again he uses Romans 13 to demonstrate the conservative Protestant view that ‘the primary function of the state is judicial’.⁶⁶

9.10.4 Of course the lack of it being quoted frequently does not mean that it has not been used for the purposes cited in *Irish Kairos* as a buttress for the hegemony

⁶² J. McMaster, *Biblical Perspectives on the Peace Process* (Belfast: Methodist Church, 1995), p.7.

⁶³ Timothy Kinahan, *Where do we go from here? Protestants and the Future of Northern Ireland* (Columba Press, Dublin 1995), p.31.

⁶⁴ Andre Lascaris, *To do the Unexpected: Reading Scripture in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Corrymeela Press, 1993), p.69.

⁶⁵ A. Thomson, *Fields of Vision: Faith and Identity in Protestant Ireland* (Belfast: Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland, 2002), p.65.

⁶⁶ Thomson, *Fields of Vision: Faith and Identity in Protestant Ireland*, p.84.

of the state. In fact *Irish Kairos* argues in relation to ‘Partition Theology’ that it ‘is in some senses so intrinsic to Irish religion that it is not very clearly formulated.’⁶⁷ In an examination of the relationship between Church and state in the New Testament, Walter Pilgrim speaks of how, ‘Most branches of Christendom, though not all, developed their basic understanding of the state from Pauline and post-Pauline Traditions.’⁶⁸ So *Irish Kairos* would seem to be on strong ground here in its contention that what Pilgrim terms this ‘ethic of subordination’⁶⁹ has been the dominant paradigm for Church/state relationships in Ireland.

9.10.5 The difficulty with Romans 13 is not the view that the state is divinely willed, existing for the common good, but that this can then be absolutized into the view that all governments, no matter who they are, and what they do must be owed unqualified obedience.⁷⁰ Very few Christians, if any, want to give a theological justification for *de facto* power no matter how it came to exist or what it does. As Kasemann states, ‘The problem of political force does not come into view. This is the real problem of the passage.’⁷¹

9.10.6 In relation to the state, much of the struggle of the Church has been to hold together the words of Acts 5:29, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority’ with Romans 13:1, ‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God’. It may well be correct that the ‘partition theology’ of which *Irish Kairos* speaks does use Romans 13:1 as a foundation text, but it does so with Acts 5:29 as a get out clause. *Irish Kairos* admits that neither North or South have the churches given the state *carte*

⁶⁷ *Irish Kairos* p.14

⁶⁸ Walter E. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbours: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), p.27.

⁶⁹ Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbours Church and State in the New Testament* pp.7-36

⁷⁰ Pilgrim points out how the Barmen Declaration though written as a protest against the emergence of the Third Reich under Hitler that even within this there is the acknowledgement that “the state has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace” p.36

⁷¹ Ernst Kasemann trans and ed. Geoffrey Bromley *Commentary on Romans* (Grand rapids Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980), p.359.

blanche; challenging it when ‘there is a threat to their power from the State itself such as the Anglo-Irish Agreement in the North or the Divorce Referendum in the South.’⁷²

9.11 An Excursus on the State, the Bible and Northern Ireland

9.11.1 Chapters Four and Five examined how the state in Northern Ireland, in terms of the Stormont Parliament and then under Direct Rule from Westminster, treated the Roman Catholic minority. In the context of this chapter, there is now a reflection on what the response was of the Churches to the state in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, is it possible to go further and answer the question as to what the response of the Churches should have been?

9.11.2 Surveying the relationship between state and Church in the New Testament, Pilgrim concludes that there is not a single attitude towards the state, but rather a range of responses.⁷³ But he does want to say that taking the New Testament altogether, the picture given of states and governments is not one of good and kindly powers but rather it paints a view of structures that can be both unjust and oppressive. So Christians should always be aware of the dangers that come from the state and be ready to stand against it when they have to.⁷⁴

9.11.3 In terms of the Protestant community of Northern Ireland, the attitude towards the state has generally been one of subordination. For the Roman Catholic community, an ethic of resistance, which is summed up in the teaching of the Book of Revelation and Revelation 13 in particular, would seem to have been the dominant paradigm. However, there would not be the same tendency in the Roman Catholic Church to go to the Bible for proof texts as can happen in the Protestant Churches. McVeigh sums up the Roman Catholic view that Irish

⁷² *Irish kairos* p.8

⁷³ Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbours: Church and State in the New Testament*, p.2.

⁷⁴ ‘When necessary, in fact, the church must be ready to oppose the state and bear the consequences.’ Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbours*, p.186.

political history 'should properly be regarded as a history of resistance by the oppressed to British oppression. During certain periods when bishops and priests were targeted by the English authorities, the Catholic Church hierarchy was unavoidably involved in that resistance.'⁷⁵

9.11.4 Indeed, the relationship between church and state in Northern Ireland would seem to be a prime example of what Brueggemann terms 'simplistic formulations of "Romans 13-Revelation 13" ("13-13"),'⁷⁶ or as Craddock says 'For those who call Caesar "Lord" the matter is simply handled. For those who call Caesar "Satan" the matter is just as simply handled.'⁷⁷ We see a Northern Ireland version of "13-13" as Protestant Churches will tend to stress law and order while Roman Catholics will speak about justice.⁷⁸

9.11.5 Yet, the history of church/state relations in Northern Ireland is more complex than the formula "13-13" would suggest. At times the Protestant community has replaced subordination and loyalty with resistance. This occurred when the state is seen to be acting against what they consider to be their best interests; for example, in the threat of armed resistance to Home Rule in 1912, the Ulster Workers' Council Strike of 1974 and the opposition to the Anglo Irish Agreement of 1985. The argument has been that the Protestant population has always continued to be loyal but that loyalty is to the Queen and not necessarily to the British Parliament. In that the Queen has a purely symbolic political role, it does seem that the 'loyalism' of Northern Irish Protestants is rather conditional. On the Roman Catholic side, while 'resistance' has generally been the default position of the community, at times when the Protestant community has been least comfortable with the British state as described above, their position has moved towards 'subordination'. 'At other times - and certainly in recent times, as a result of a deliberate policy

⁷⁵Joe McVeigh, *Renewing the Irish Church* (Cork: Mercier, 1993), p.86.

⁷⁶Editor's Foreword by Walter Brueggemann in *Pilgrim, Uneasy Neighbours*, p.vii.

⁷⁷Fred Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), p.236.

⁷⁸Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation*, p.83.

by the British government of co-opting the Roman Catholic hierarchy - it has tried to weaken that resistance.'⁷⁹

9.11.6 Pilgrim offers a contemporary paradigm for church/state relations which coheres with his New Testament study. This paradigm was developed by Strieter.

- A critical-constructive stance *is appropriate when the powers that be are attempting to achieve justice.*
- A critical-transformative stance *when authority errs, but can be realistically moved to salutary change.*

*A critically resistive stance when the powers are responsible for demonic injustice or idolatry and refuse to be responsible to change*⁸¹

9.11.7 A further paradigm for church/ state relationship is provided by Bonhoeffer, which can be applied in other contexts from his own.

All this means that there are three possible ways in which the church can act towards the state: in the first place, as has been said, it can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate and in accordance with its character as state, i.e. it can throw the state back on its responsibilities. Secondly, it can aid the victims of state action. The church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community. 'Do good to all men.' In both these courses of action, the church serves the free state in its free way, and at times when laws are changed the church may in no way withdraw itself from these two tasks. The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself. Such action would be direct political action, and is only possible and demanded when the church sees the state fail in its

⁷⁹McVeigh, *Renewing the Irish Church*, p.86. This is why the idea of 'Minjung' is so useful.

⁸¹ Thomas W. Streiter, 'Two Kingdoms and Governances Thinking for Today's World', *Currents in Theology and Mission* (February 1989), p.35. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbours*, p.192.

function of creating law and order, i.e. When it sees the state unrestrainedly bring about too much or too little law and order. In both these cases it must see the existence of the state, and with it its own existence, threatened. There would be too little law if any group of subjects were deprived of their rights, too much where the state intervened in the character of the church and its proclamation, e.g. In the forced exclusion of baptised Jews from our Christian congregations or in the prohibition of our mission to the Jews.⁸²

9.11.8 Much of the reflection on Bonhoeffer's views on the state has focussed on where he speaks of not just 'bandaging the victims, under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself.' So the discussion continues about the justification or not for violent revolution to overthrow the state. But what is significant in this passage is the fact that Bonhoeffer is the first German theologian to use the term 'victim' with reference to the behaviour of the state. Other theologians did not, at that time, see the German state as an entity that victimised.⁸³ When he states that the Church has 'an unconditional obligation' to help the victims of any social order, even if they do not belong to the Christian Church, he is saying that 'in no way is the institution responsible only for the *victims* in its own ranks.'⁸⁴ This is a lesson that the Churches in Northern Ireland have to learn.

9.11.9 For both Strieter and Bonhoeffer governments have been provided by God for the good of humanity. Nevertheless, one of the key words in the paradigm of Strieter is 'critical' and it appears in all his options of relationships between Church and state. There is not an 'uncritical' option that the Church can take.

⁸² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936* (London: Collins, 1965), p.221.

⁸³ Alejandro Zorzin, 'Church versus State: Human Rights, the Church, and the Jewish Question (1933)', in *Bonhoeffer for a New Day: Theology in a Time of Transition. Papers Presented at the Seventh International Bonhoeffer Congress Cape Town, 1996* (ed. John W. De Gruchy; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), p.244.

⁸⁴ Zorzin, 'Church versus State' p.244.

9.12 Ecumenical Theology

9.12.1 Returning to *Irish Kairos*, the second theological category which is used in relation to the 'Troubles' is ecumenical or reconciling theology.⁸⁵ In contrast to 'Partition' or 'Status quo' theology this is cited as being 'a very well articulated theology which has emerged as a direct response to the particular Northern Ireland situation.'⁸⁶ This theological category corresponds to the second category in the *Kairos Document* termed as 'Church theology'. The *Kairos Document* identifies the main concepts of 'Church theology' as being reconciliation, justice and non-violence.⁸⁷ However the argument is put forward that the reconciliation of which 'Church theology' speaks is a peace that is easy, cheap or false. The connection is severed between peace and justice. It looks for a peace which refuses to face up to the issues which have caused the conflict-injustice and oppression.

9.12.2 For Forrester, this approach to political theology can be associated with Tertullian. Here the theologian addresses the state from within the Church and the Church is seen as a kind of alternative community providing a sign for all humanity.⁸⁸ McCaughey associates this theology with the role of the 'sage' featuring a primary concern with pastoral work, relations within the family and individuals, in a society of which they offer no critique.⁸⁹

9.12.3 The concentration of 'ecumenical theology' on bringing Protestant and Roman Catholics together has meant that this particular theological response to the 'Troubles' has elicited huge support and interest from across the globe and *Irish Kairos* acknowledges 'the immense work that has been done by men and

⁸⁵ *Irish kairos* p.6.

⁸⁶ *Irish kairos* p.14.

⁸⁷ *The Kairos Document* pp.11-17

⁸⁸ Forrester, *Theology and Politics* pp20-21 and 163-168

⁸⁹ McCaughey *Memory & Redemption Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland* p.134

women whose gospel has been reconciliation.’⁹⁰ Nevertheless, despite this affirmation and stating that ecumenical theology has moved beyond partition theology, the question is raised as to how it ‘Still has blind spots or gaps which prevent it from responding to the conflict in a decisive way?’⁹¹

9.13 Blind Spots

9.13.1 These blind spots are: 1) The analysis of the conflict; 2) The attitude towards the state; and 3) The treatment of violence.

9.13.2 For *Irish Kairos* the characterisation which ecumenical theology makes of the conflict is that it involves a failure in communication between the two communities or traditions within Northern Ireland. Taking this view from *Breaking Down the Enmity*, it argues that ecumenical theology sees the conflict as being perpetuated by the fear each community has of the other. The way to break out of this is by reconciliation between people, communities and traditions. But *Irish Kairos* raises the question as to whether fear and enmity is necessarily a bad thing; they suggest, contrary to *Breaking Down the Enmity* that fear and resentment may actually be an adequate response to an inadequate reality. As they say:

To talk about fear, hatred and enmity ‘psychologises’ the problem. But an adequate explanation of the conflict requires grasping the realities of political, economic and social power and powerlessness in which the fears are rooted. Overcoming fear may mean overcoming reality insofar as the reality is unjust. Ecumenical theology seems strangely silent about present unjust practices and structures as factors in the Northern Irish conflict.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Irish kairos* p.15

⁹¹ *Irish kairos* p.15

⁹² *Irish kairos* p.15

This clearly echoes the language and critique of the *Kairos Document* which argues against reconciliation being made into an 'absolute principle'.

Obviously, in reference to South Africa it posits the view that in some conflicts one side is right and the other wrong. Christianity is supposed to overcome evil not come to terms with it and to speak of reconciliation is to distort the Christian view of reconciliation.⁹³

9.13.3 The challenge is then issued to ecumenical theology to clarify its attitude towards the state in Northern Ireland. For *Irish Kairos*, 'Ecumenical theology seems to have no way of assessing the State's legitimacy.'⁹⁴ In *Breaking Down the Enmity*, the legitimacy of the state is a given. Speaking of the power of the British government we are told that, '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.'⁹⁵

9.13.4 This view of the government by *Breaking Down the Enmity* would be seen by the *Kairos Document*, in their particular situation, as a typical example of 'Church theology' which seeks reform through appeals to the government in South Africa. The document itself comments, 'God does not bring his justice through reforms introduced by the Pharaohs of this world.'⁹⁶ *Breaking Down the Enmity* sees the crux of the problem as being the attitude of the two communities to each other. While for *Irish Kairos*, it is the apparatus and structure of the state which is the problem, with the stance of the communities vis-a-vis one another being a result of this, *Breaking Down the Enmity* identifies as a solution that which *Irish Kairos* cites as the problem.

9.13.5 According to *Irish Kairos*, the third blind spot for ecumenical theology is its treatment of violence. It posits the view that the most consistent Christian

⁹³ *Kairos Document* pp.11-12

⁹⁴ *Irish Kairos* p.15

⁹⁵ BDE p.36

⁹⁶ *Kairos Document* p.14

response in relation to the situation in Northern Ireland has been the rejection of violence. Yet, it accuses ecumenical theology of being inconsistent in their attitude towards violence. For *Irish Kairos*, Christians in Northern Ireland have by and large acquiesced in the use of violence by the state. In fact the very focus on violence as the core issue in the conflict has allowed the Churches to avoid examining the issues which have caused people to take up arms in the first place.

9.13.6 In relation to violence a case study is then given of plastic bullets used by the police in Northern Ireland as a means of crowd control. Up to Easter 1986 twelve people were killed by plastic bullets (all Roman Catholic). A number of these people died in disputed circumstances.⁹⁷ No statement was ever made by an inter-church group concerning plastic bullets. During Easter 1986, a Protestant, Keith White, died after being struck by a plastic bullet. *Irish Kairos* argues that this shows the weakness of an ecumenical approach which refuses to tackle contentious issues, outside matters of doctrine, for fear of being seen as partial. What this approach does is to show 'the dangers of impartiality for theology. It renders itself mute in the face of evil. For now a statement condemning plastic bullets would be perceived as partial by the Catholic community.'⁹⁸

9.13.7 The great difference they have with ecumenical theology is that in relation to what they term as its three blind spots there is a consistent refusal to acknowledge injustice as being a major factor in the conflict and thus the correct theological approach for ecumenical theology is to refuse to take

⁹⁷ To date seventeen people have been killed by plastic (and its predecessor rubber) bullets in Northern Ireland. Eight of them were children and one was a woman. The number of people seriously injured runs into hundreds. There have been two international tribunals of enquiry into the injuries and deaths they have caused, 3-4 August 1981 and 16th October 1982, organised by the association for legal justice. They are still in use in Northern Ireland and the situation remains the same today as at the writing of *Irish Kairos* that all the fatal casualties except one have been Roman Catholic. See Liz Curtis, *They Shoot Children* (Information on Ireland 1982); *A Report on the Misuse of the Baton Round in the North of Ireland* (Submission by the United Campaign against Plastic Bullets to the Mitchell Commission, 1996); and including a theological reflection: Raymond Murray *State Violence Northern Ireland 1969-1997* (Mercier, Dublin, 1998) pp.129-144.

⁹⁸ *Irish kairos* p.17.

sides.⁹⁹ As ecumenical or reconciling theology looks for ways forward, it concentrates on bringing people together, i.e., psychologising the conflict, making it a matter of how the communities and individuals ‘feel’ about one another, bringing people together to ‘understand one another better’, while the substantive theological response focuses on solving doctrinal sticking points. For Irish Kairos that is far short of what is needed and it now turns to elucidating the positive side of its theology.¹⁰⁰

9.14 Prophetic Theology

9.14.1 The third category is that of ‘prophetic theology’ and here *Irish Kairos* uses exactly the same nomenclature as the *Kairos Document*. Forrester relates ‘prophetic theology’ to the thought of Augustine, seeing what is held in common as:

They seek to relate today’s society to the life of the Kingdom and are sensitive both to the ambiguities and constraints of the political system and to the challenging and already partially realised hope of the kingdom of justice and peace.¹⁰¹

9.14.2 McCaughey uses the same terminology of ‘prophetic theology’ which for him is concerned with public intervention, a holding up of the underlying assumptions of national and economic life up to analysis and to express misgivings, pronounce judgment and suggest a better way for Society.¹⁰² He has a series of questions for the Irish Churches. Summing them up, his overarching question is whether the role of the Churches in Ireland is that of priests, sages, or prophets? When they intervene publicly, is their concern the life of their institutions or their place and prestige in society? Is their concern a pastoral one, working on relationships in and between individuals, but offering

⁹⁹ *Irish kairos* p.17.

¹⁰⁰ *Irish kairos* p.6.

¹⁰¹ Forrester, *Theology and Politics* p.168

¹⁰² McCaughey, *Memory & Redemption Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland* p.134

no critique of the society of which they are a part? When the Irish Churches intervene publicly do they hold the underlying assumptions of the nation's life up to scrutiny, express misgivings, perhaps pronounce judgement and suggest a better way? ¹⁰³

9.14.3 While not belittling the first two categories, the focus of McCaughey's writing is on the failure of any substantive prophetic tradition in Ireland. ¹⁰⁴ This is particularly the case in relation to the divisions in Northern Ireland. He argues that Church leaders and representative bodies have contributed little, though there were exceptions. 'The phrase 'our people', meaning our Presbyterian, Catholic or Church of Ireland people, is on their lips more frequently than it should be.' ¹⁰⁵ Smyth, outlining her experience when the Glencree Centre of Reconciliation held a follow up enquiry in 1997-1998 on the challenges to the Churches from the Opsahl Commission, has spoken of how the Churches have failed to act or speak with authority. For her, 'a structural density and procedural deficit was clearly evident' and 'the voice that should speak boldly of peace and justice prevaricates and is not heard.' ¹⁰⁶

9.15 Lessons from Elsewhere

9.15.1 *Irish Kairos* makes explicit the connection with the thought and struggles of Christians in the third world and contextualises 'prophetic theology' within the Irish situation by pointing out that its influence is due to the transmitting of ideas from the third world to Ireland by returning missionaries. Unlike the other two theologies, it is seen as being a 'theology of involvement' of those who are not normally included in the decision making processes of society.

Rather than making respect for the state a touchstone of involvement in the world, those who seek to witness in a prophetic way would see the

¹⁰³ McCaughey, *Memory & Redemption Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland* p.134

¹⁰⁴ He does commend the work of the Irish Churches in areas of poverty, political violence, unemployment and emigration. McCaughey, *Memory and Redemption*, p.142.

¹⁰⁵ McCaughey, *Memory and Redemption*, p.91.

¹⁰⁶ Smyth, 'In the Middle Ground and Meantime', p.96.

inequalities existing in Ireland today and seek to change society by struggling with those who are disadvantaged. Their assessment of the value of activity in the world would depend on whether the poor and oppressed begin to have more access to power, and to involvement in society.¹⁰⁷

9.15.2 Later in the document it makes explicit who exactly it believes has been excluded from the workings of Northern Irish society: the victims, the prisoners, and the poor.¹⁰⁸ They disabuse us of the idea that they can systematise the ideas which constitute ‘prophetic theology’. As they say, it is ‘a process which is tentative because new, painful because unpopular, and risky because it believes in change.’ This is similar to the sentiment expressed in the introduction to the *Kairos Document* that it is a document which is open-ended and cannot therefore be said to be final. The introduction also puts the focus on the theological process rather than product.¹⁰⁹

9.15.3 For *Irish Kairos*, the clearest aspect of ‘prophetic theology’ is to be seen as ‘the thirst for justice’. This is not just about justice between individuals but rather justice for the whole community in Northern Ireland which they define as ‘equality of access to jobs, equality of participation in the decision making processes of Northern Ireland.’¹¹⁰

9.16 Three Injustices

9.16.1 To seek for justice must mean the recognition that injustice exists. The document identifies three main injustices which they see as existing in Northern Ireland. Firstly, what they term as the first and most historic injustice which is the exclusion of the Roman Catholic community from full participation in society in Northern Ireland. At the time of writing they are

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Kairos* p.6

¹⁰⁸ *Irish kairos* p.20

¹⁰⁹ *Kairos Document* pp.2-3

¹¹⁰ *Irish Kairos* p.20

very clear that very little has been done to address the inbuilt discrimination against the Roman Catholic community. But for them, the core problem is the 'invincible majority' of Protestants which was artificially created at partition and the abuses of power that such a majority has carried out over the years.

9.16.2 The second injustice is the exclusion from power, wealth and status in Northern Ireland of what they term as 'ordinary Protestants'. 'Protestant working class areas, though to a lesser degree than Catholic areas, have been similarly exposed to the evils of unemployment, poverty and bad housing.'¹¹¹ The third main injustice is the exclusion from full participation in society of woman. They are discriminated against employment wise and have little opportunity to raise their voice in the political arena. As well as these main injustices, the document argues that many other injustices exist in Northern Ireland in relation to traveling people and homosexuals among others.¹¹²

9.17 Outside the Church is Salvation

9.17.1 For 'partition theology', the locus for theological reflection is the corridors of power, for 'ecumenical theology' it is the Church, while for 'prophetic theology' it can be within the Church but the locus for theological reflection and action is 'more often outside it.'¹¹³ Christians are urged to 'catch up' with what is already going on to bring about justice.¹¹⁴

9.17.2 In the next section, *Irish Kairos* radically states a view of paramilitary groups within Northern Ireland which had not been heard previously from an inter-church group. Harking back to their previous argument that in the context of Northern Ireland it is not adequate simply to condemn violence from one section of the community alone, and that the violence of the state

¹¹¹ *Irish Kairos* p.21

¹¹² *Irish kairos* p.21

¹¹³ *Irish Kairos* p.24

¹¹⁴ *Irish kairos* p.22

must be included in any condemnation of violence, they posit the opinion that on occasions the paramilitaries represent an attempt by ordinary people to take control of their lives. In terms of the 'theology of involvement' which they have elucidated they argue that, 'Here is the crucial test upon which to make a theological evaluation.'¹¹⁵

9.17.3 This is far from an uncritical baptising of the paramilitaries echoing their own views of themselves as 'liberators' and 'voices of the people'. The document refuses to condemn them and their activities in a blanket fashion, which Church groups had done up to that point. But, they do make the following distinction.

Where intimidation, summary justice, extortion and torture have bred fear, and excluded or prevented people from trying to bring change in their own way, it is against the will of Christ. Where the paramilitaries have sought to confront the powers that be with the injustice of the State, have sought to inject new thought into the political process (UDA's Common Sense), have striven for justice for the imprisoned and the poor, where they have sought to be a voice for the voiceless, they are indeed signs of the Kingdom of God.¹¹⁶

They go on to stress that this acknowledgment did not mean that they accepted their methods or their use of violence. But, the way to witness most effectively to the paramilitaries concerning violence is to demonstrate the futility of violence by doing the work of justice without resorting to violence.¹¹⁷ Never before, or indeed since, have a Northern Irish church group seen in the paramilitaries 'signs of the kingdom of God'. The next chapter follows on this insight of *Irish Kairos* to see whether their statement about

¹¹⁵ *Irish kairos* p.23

¹¹⁶ *Irish kairos* p.23

¹¹⁷ *Irish kairos* p.23

paramilitaries being 'signs of the Kingdom of God' proved to be an example of prophetic theology or not?

CHAPTER TEN

‘ALL GAVE SOME, SOME GAVE ALL’ - THE ROLE OF PRISONERS: A SIGN OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

10.1 Introduction

10.1.1 ‘All gave some, some gave all’ expresses the self-understanding and sacrificial language of paramilitaries and particularly their experience of imprisonment, ‘And to the men behind the wire for they have stood the test, Let's not forget their sacrifice for they are Ulster's best’. One of those interned without trial in 1972 was Pat McGuigan. The reason he was interned was that he was the author of a song ‘The Men Behind the Wire’ and the lyrics of the song were considered to be ‘inflammatory and prejudicial to peace in Northern Ireland.’¹ The sentiment of the song is that the Nationalist community stands squarely behind all of its prisoners, ‘Every man must stand behind the men behind the wire’. Certainly there were times when the whole of the Nationalist community did stand behind the prisoners, both during internment and later during the hunger strikes of the early 1980s. For the Loyalist community, there was never the same widespread support (Loyalists were not even interned initially), due to the ambiguous and contradictory nature of Loyalist paramilitarism, i.e. breaking the laws of the state to support the state.²

¹ [Http://www.scottishloyalists.co.uk/loyalistsongs.htm](http://www.scottishloyalists.co.uk/loyalistsongs.htm) Words from ‘Some Gave All’ and ‘Brian Robinson’. [Http://www.mysongbook.de/msb/songs/m/menbehin.html](http://www.mysongbook.de/msb/songs/m/menbehin.html) Indeed it was so popular that the loyalists produced their own version of the song. Peter Shirlow and Kieran McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire: Former Prisoners and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland* (London: Pluto, 2008), p.vii.

² The attitude of not seeing the loyalist paramilitaries as a threat by the security forces was summed up by an event later in the same year internment was introduced. On 4th December 1971 the UVF killed fifteen Roman Catholics in a bombing on McGurk's bar in Belfast. The British Army blamed the IRA, implying that one or more of the dead had a bomb which had detonated prematurely and calling it an ‘own goal’. It was over ten years later that the security forces admitted that the UVF had carried out the atrocity as no effort had been made to investigate Protestant paramilitary involvement at the time. See Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: OUP, 1992).

10.2 A Question of Politics?

10.2.1 In terms of discussion of prisoner issues in Northern Ireland, the term 'politically motivated prisoners' has been used increasingly from the mid-nineteen nineties.³ The preferred self-designation of prisoners from both communities would be 'prisoner of war', with the term 'Loyalist' or 'Republican' tagged onto the front. However, 'prisoner of war' has a precise legal significance under international law that has not applied to those imprisoned during the Northern Irish conflict. The question of whether those committing violence have been politically motivated has been a contentious issue through the years. Nonetheless, a recognition of political motivation has been there, almost from the beginning of the conflict, in the legislation used to respond to the violence. Prisoners were classed as political who were convicted of offenses that were 'scheduled' under the Emergency Legislation from 1972 onwards and who thus used 'violence for political ends'.⁴

10.2.2 As already mentioned, part of the Gardiner recommendations released at the beginning of 1975 coined the two words 'normalisation' (the downgrading of the characterisation of the violence in Northern Ireland to criminal activity rather than a war) and 'criminalisation' which meant that the practice of giving 'political status' to those who were detained or interned without trial, or 'special category status' to those convicted in non-jury courts was phased out. The implementation of the Gardiner report ultimately led to the Hunger Strikes; but also meant that by branding the violence as simply criminal activity, attention was diverted away from dealing with the political roots of the violence and trying to find a political initiative that might alleviate the conflict. In terms of the response of the Churches, the Gardener

³ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.23.

⁴ Scheduled offenses are those that are normally connected with the perpetration of acts of terrorism such as: manslaughter, murder, riot, weapons and explosive offenses etc. From 1973 if you were charged with a scheduled offense you were tried in a single judge court, without a jury and with different rules of evidence that applied to nonscheduled offenses. Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.23.

report facilitated the non-engagement with the paramilitaries and with the political process.⁵

10.2.3 From the removal of special category or political status in 1976 to the beginning of the first hunger strike of 1980, Republican prisoners refused to wear prison uniform, being clad instead in their prison-issue blankets. The first line of a popular song in the republican community at the time ran, 'So I'll wear no convict's uniform nor meekly serve my time'.⁶ The protest then escalated to becoming a no-wash and subsequently a dirty protest when the prisoners smeared the walls with their own excrement. The Loyalists also felt strongly about the abolition of political status and took part in a 'clean protest' refusing to wear a uniform or do any prison work while still keeping their cells clean.

10.2.4 The first hunger strike began in 1979 with seven prisoners refusing food and demanding political status, which had developed into five demands: the right to wear their own clothes, to be exempt from prison work, to have freedom of association with fellow republican prisoners, the right to organise educational and recreational facilities, and the restoration of remission lost as a result of the protest. After the first hunger strike ended in confusion with both sides claiming victory, the second strike began in March 1981. In the second strike, unlike the first, the prisoners joined the strike in stages and initially there was very little support, even within their own Republican constituency. This changed with the death of the first striker Bobby Sands who was elected as a Member of Parliament and it was estimated that over one hundred thousand people attended his funeral. Under pressure from the families of those on the protest, and encouraged by the Roman Catholic prison chaplains who urged the families to intervene medically when their sons lapsed into unconsciousness, the hunger strike ceased in October 1981 after the death of ten men.

⁵ There were honourable exceptions to the non-engagement with Protestant churchmen and six members of the Provisional IRA Army Council holding talks which took place in Feakle, Co. Clare on 10 December 1974. The Provisionals set out their demands, while the clergy gave a number of proposals for the Provisionals to examine as the basis for a permanent ceasefire. After the meeting the Provisionals also called a temporary ceasefire to give time for the British Government to respond to their proposals.

⁶ 'The H-Block Song' www.irelandsown.net/hblocksong.html.

10.2.5 The perception among the prisoners themselves felt that the protest was a failure, with one prisoner writing: ‘Despite my relief that no one else would die, I still felt gutted because ten men had died and we had not won our demands. My morale was never as low.’⁷ However, concessions were quickly made, within days, in terms of allowing the prisoners to wear their own clothes at all times and over the years the five demands were granted piece by piece.

10.2.6 Margaret Thatcher famously stated: ‘There is no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence. We will not compromise on this. There will be no political status.’⁸ Ironically, it can be seen that the denial of political status and the hunger strikes led to the development of Sinn Fein as a political force, which was to lead some twenty years later to several ex-Republican prisoners achieving ministerial office in a newly devolved administration in Northern Ireland.⁹ Despite Mrs Thatcher’s words, the criminalisation argument was now dead in the water. In terms of the hunger strikers, it was clear that in relation to their motivation and dedication to a political cause they were certainly distinguishable from those in Northern Ireland ironically called ODCs (Ordinary Decent Criminals) who, of course, included rapists, child abusers, etc. As McKittrick and McVea say, ‘The hungerstrikers thus won political status in the eyes of the world.’¹⁰

10.3 The Churches - ‘Whatever You Say, Say Nothing’

10.3.1 The hunger strikes led not just to a new tranche of recruits for Sinn Fein and the IRA but a new low occurred, among a series of new lows during the ‘Troubles’, for community relationships in the North. As the largest institutions of civil society in Northern Ireland, the Churches reflected the rawness and bitterness that characterised the interaction between the two communities. The ecumenical movement in Northern

⁷ David McKittrick and David McVea *Making Sense of the Troubles* (London: Penguin, 2001), p.146.

⁸ *The Times*, 6 March 1981.

⁹ Liam Clarke, *Broadening the Battlefield: The H-Blocks and the Rise of Sinn Fein* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1987).

¹⁰ McKittrick and McVea *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.147.

Ireland was silent regarding the hunger strikes, highlighting the reluctance and/or inability of the Churches together to engage in a constructive way with the political realities of Northern Ireland, especially when difficult and painful times like the hunger strikes cried out for them to do so. In fact, inter - Church relations deteriorated, despite the silence, as the Roman Catholic Primate of Ireland, Cardinal Tomas O’Fiaich was perceived to be in support of the hunger strikers. O’Fiaich had visited the Maze during the dirty protest and said, "I was shocked by the inhuman conditions . . . where over 300 prisoners are incarcerated. One would hardly allow an animal to remain in such conditions let alone a human being. The nearest approach to it that I have seen was the spectacle of hundreds of homeless people living in sewer pipes in the slums of Calcutta." Then when hunger striker Raymond McCreech died, Ó Fiaich stated: "Raymond McCreech was captured bearing arms at the age of 19 and sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment. I have no doubt that he would have never seen the inside of a jail but for the abnormal political situation. Who is entitled to label him a murderer or a suicide?"¹¹ The perception of many in the Unionist community was that O’Fiach and thus the Roman Catholic Church by his intervention was supporting the cause of the ‘men of violence’. For Power, the role of O’Fiaich helped galvanise ‘an already growing conservative element within Presbyterianism.’¹²

10.4 How much influence?

10.4.1 While issues like the hunger strikes can galvanise the wider population into support and action; how wide is the impact of politically-motivated prisoners? At times during the troubles Northern Ireland had the highest percentage of prisoners in Europe. Up to the 1998 Agreement, Gormally calculates over twenty thousand politically motivated prisoners had been sent to prison during the troubles, this in a population of around 1.5 million.¹³ For Shirlow and McEvoy, ‘it is notoriously difficult to estimate the total number imprisoned’ plumping for a figure of around fifteen thousand

¹¹ www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom%C3%A1s_%C3%93_Fiaich#endnote_Maze (Accessed 4th March 2006). See also McKittrick and McVea *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.140.

¹² Power, *From Ecumenism to Community Relations: Inter-Church Relationships in Northern Ireland 1980-2005*, p.229.

¹³ For a detailed breakdown of the figures see: Brian Gormally, *Conversion from War to Peace: Reintegration of Ex - Prisoners in Northern Ireland* (Bonn: BICC, 2001), p.41.

Republicans and between five to ten thousand Loyalists.¹⁴ McKittrick and McVea estimate around thirty thousand politically-motivated prisoners, with both Loyalists and Republicans having fifteen thousand each.¹⁵ Also, in support of O’Fiaich, it was clear that a number of those who were in prison would probably not have been there in any ‘normal’ society not racked by inter-cine civil strife.

10.4.2 Nonetheless, we are only still speaking of no more than two to three and a half per cent of the total adult population of Northern Ireland being imprisoned for political reasons.¹⁶ Or we can argue that this meant, ‘more than 30,000 men were involved with groups that have carried out killings and a great deal of other violence, a statistic which illustrates how deeply society was permeated by paramilitarism.’¹⁷ But, there is little doubt that the experience of and connection to political imprisonment is a feature of life in Loyalist and Republican areas. This is especially true of the discrete working class areas, that are the most socially deprived in the Province, which have borne the brunt of much of the conflict. Of the 3440 deaths during the Troubles almost half of them occurred in Belfast (1682). West and North Belfast between them accounted for 1270 of those deaths. As the authors of *Lost Lives* comment:

The names of the most violent areas occur again and again in the text of this work: Falls, Andersonstown, Ballymurphy, Whiterock, Woodvale, Shankill, Crumlin, Ardoyne, New Lodge, Tiger Bay, Short Strand, the Markets and so on. These have been the heartlands of paramilitarism, producing large percentages of the victims as well as large percentages of the prison population.¹⁸

Within these small areas, of the 572 deaths that occurred in North Belfast most happened around an area of the Antrim Road known locally as ‘murder mile’, the

¹⁴ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.2.

¹⁵ McKittrick and McVea *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.150.

¹⁶ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.84.

¹⁷ McKittrick and McVea *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.150. While they speak of ‘30,000 men’ they forget that some twenty per cent of Republican and around five per cent of Loyalist prisoners were female.

¹⁸ D.McKittrick, S.Kelters, B.Feeney, C.Thornton and D.McVea, *Lost Lives - The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, p.1534.

percentage and influence of prisoners and ex-prisoners is much greater than the numbers might at first suggest.

10.5 Why are politically-motivated prisoners important?

10.5.1 Background

10.5.1.1 Gormally argues that, 'The prisons tend to be an important battleground in any conflict.'¹⁹ For him the conflict can be seen to be more intense in the prisons than anywhere else. The engagement between the state and the enemy in a sense occurred twenty four hours a day seven days a week at extremely close quarters. In Northern Ireland the prisoners saw themselves as being combatants and that their struggles, whatever way they perceived them, continued while they were in prison.²⁰ For Republicans especially, prison was clearly an extension of the outside struggle with the dirty protests and the hunger strikes of 1981 leading to the subsequent role of Sinn Fein in the peace process.

10.5.1.2 It is not just that prisoners are a very significant constituency, especially within the working class communities of Northern Ireland, 'But the most important factor is that prisoners are symbolic representatives of their communities. They represent, first, all ex-prisoners already in the community, second, their families and finally they also represent the communities from which they come.'²¹ Prisons and the issues surrounding prisoners and ex-prisoners are microcosms of the conflict.

¹⁹ Gormally, *Conversion from War to Peace*, p.6.

²⁰ Gormally, *Conversion from War to Peace*, p.6. I would contend that this explains the very personal and vicious nature of a number of the murders of prison officers.

²¹ Gormally, *Conversion from War to Peace*, p.6.

10.5.2. Education, Education, Education

10.5.2.1 One of the things the prisoners brought to their communities was the benefit of education. Of the long-term prisoners, about 5 per cent, 40 or 50 a year, studied with the Open University, while a higher percentage took remedial English classes and O Levels. That five per cent translated into working-class areas such as the Falls, Newtownards and the Shankill roads, has had a considerable impact. On the Loyalist side almost all were 11-plus failures and two of them David Ervine and Billy Hutchison went on to become Open University graduates and members of the Northern Ireland Assembly.²²

10.5.2.2 The Loyalist and Republican paramilitary organisations had different approaches to education. Initially, the Loyalists were organised by their commanders and at first this was inspired by the UVF Officer Commanding, Gusty Spence.²³ For the Republicans education was primarily a way of keeping IRA prisoners together as a coherent political grouping. The benefit of this education was firstly for the prisoners themselves in that they were able to use their degrees to help them find work. For example Jim Watt, a Loyalist prisoner, left school without any qualifications to become an apprentice fitter. He got a first-class degree while in prison in maths and now runs an Information Technology training centre on the Shankill Road. Beyond the personal benefit, Breige Gadd, the former chief probation officer for Northern Ireland, has no doubts that the education received by many prisoners has become a boon to the whole community. She speaks of how the prisoners by their educational experiences 'realised that there was no future in a continued war in Northern Ireland. So they began to train themselves to be community resources for peace on the outside.'²⁴

²² Speaking about the education of David Ervine, Sinnerton writes: 'In 1965 some 20 per cent of pupils passed the eleven-plus and went on to one of the 81 grammar schools in Northern Ireland where all pupils took the compulsory GCE public examination in a range of subjects. In that same year the total entries for GCE in all subjects from the 137 secondary schools amounted to 587 candidates. No single statistic more tellingly illustrates the glaring inequality between the two types of school.' Henry Sinnerton, *David Ervine: Uncharted Waters* (London: Brandon, 2002), p.17.

²³ On Spence's encouraging the UVF prisoners to learn both Irish history and the Irish language and his role in the peace process see: Roy Garland, *Gusty Spence* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2001).

²⁴ Briege Gadd quoted in Sinnerton, *David Ervine*, p.59.

10.5.3 Community involvement

10.5.3.1 Once a prisoner became an ex - prisoner, they were not a huge amount of use to the paramilitary organisation, in that they were known and perhaps monitored by the security forces. The real need for paramilitaries was for so called 'clean skins'. In that it was often difficult for an ex - prisoner to get a job and with their perhaps changed perspectives from prison, many of them gravitated to community work and community organisations. Having been seen as fighting for their 'own people', ex - prisoners receive a hearing when they speak for moderation in dealing with the conflict, unlike the Churches who when they speak they are easily dismissed as 'do-gooders'. It does seem to be another paradox of Northern Ireland that if you want to be an advocate of non-violence, in order to be listened to you need to have used violence in the first place. Though, perhaps this attitude is not so strange if the view is that those condemning violence have either benefited from violence and/or the threat of violence (for example Ian Paisley using the Loyalist paramilitaries to support his strike in 1974, or John Hume's 'good cop/bad cop' approach to negotiations in effect saying "if you do not negotiate with me, you will have to deal with them"). Or, you are seen to have employed a force/violence distinction in order to avoid criticising the violence of the state (the Protestant Churches and the ecumenical movement).

10.5.3.2 Shirlow and McEvoy argue that the ex-prisoners who get involved in community work 'do, on the whole, bring a considerable degree of credibility, respect and legitimacy to such programmes.'²⁵ As well as bringing credibility to the message of peacemaking among their own paramilitary constituency, they can also frame or sell the message in a way that is appropriate and congruent with the way of thinking of their particular organisation.²⁶ In my own encounters with ex - prisoners I have been impressed by their desire that no one else should have to do what they have done, or go through what they have gone through. Because of that many of them have been among those who been prepared to take the greatest risks for peace in contrast to the mainline politicians and the Churches.

²⁵ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.126.

²⁶ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.128.

10.5.4 Leadership

10.5.4.1 Anyone with a cursory knowledge of recent Northern Irish history will know that most of the people who negotiated the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 from Loyalist and Republican parties were former politically-motivated prisoners. The most well known were, on the Republican side Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and Gerry Kelly, while on the Loyalist side it was David Ervine, Gusty Spence and Billy Hutchinson. One of the interesting things that came out of the negotiations leading up to the Agreement, was the admission by the former prisoners that negotiating skills learned in prison while dealing with the Authorities had been invaluable in forming the 1998 accord.²⁷

10.5.4.2 Mike Ritchie, former Director of Coiste na n-Iarchimi the largest organisation working with Republican ex-prisoners, and the main author of *Irish Kairos*²⁸ says, 'I've often described former prisoners as middle managers in the peace process.'²⁹ He goes on to say that for him they easily slip into a role of leadership in the communities they come from and that this is true of the Republican community, but of the Loyalist community also. Those who work with ex-prisoners, speak again and again of the work that is done day in and day out by ex-prisoners in preventing community flare ups in the dangerous and tense interface areas of Belfast.³⁰ We have seen that one of the difficulties of ecumenism in Northern Ireland has been the owning of agreements and good will between Church leaders and institutions at the grass roots level. While there has been criticism of the peace process as being 'top-down', there is no doubt that one of the groups that have made it work has been the ex-prisoners and the

²⁷ Sinnerton, *David Ervine: Uncharted Waters*, p.174.

²⁸ Almost uniquely in the context of Northern Ireland work with ex-prisoners, Mike Ritchie as a protestant (though he describes himself proudly as a Presbyterian Socialist) is from the 'other' community from the ex-prisoners he works with. This was not just a brave step for Mike, but also controversial within the Republican community that their organisation for ex-prisoners would be headed up not just by a non ex-prisoner, but a protestant. It is generally agreed now that it has been an excellent and important appointment and is an encouraging 'sign of the times'.

²⁹ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.139.

³⁰ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.123. 'Broadly, former prisoners have had three types of roles to play in conflict transformation within and between their respective communities. In the first instance, they are involved in practical community development work within these communities...Second, they are involved in direct conflict-related work,...Finally, some former prisoners are more broadly involved in the creation of personal, communal and social narratives.'

organisations that represent them, as they have mediated with their communities arguing against sectarian violence and encouraging younger generations to seek different paths from those they chose when they were younger. These connections both downwards and to the edge of communities, that do not seem to exist within the Churches, also mean that the ex-prisoners seem to be able to both stretch and move their communities in ways that the Churches and the more traditional political parties seem unable or unwilling to do. Again this seems to be of their deep understanding of the limits of their constituencies, limits that turned out to be much broader than anyone dreamed of, due to the rootedness and incarnational role they have played.

10.6 Theological Reflections

10.6.1 Encounter and Dialogue

10.6.1.1 Education for the prisoners was not just a place where they encountered ideas, but in prison they were able to encounter the 'other' and to go beyond what might be called the 'tea and buns ecumenism'³¹ of Northern Ireland and actually engage in heated political discussion and debate.³² On his meetings with the republicans of the Official IRA, Ervine said 'there was more political debate took place than there was education.'³³ In fact, it is very useful to compare the dialogue facilitated by the Churches towards peace and reconciliation with the experience of prisoners.

10.6.1.2 Gusty Spence has spoken about how the prison experience was a microcosm of the society outside.³⁴ But there was a sense that what happened in prison, for all the brutalities and difficulties that the experience involved, was better than that which was

³¹ My own experience of ecumenism was often that everyone was so intent on being polite to one another that all differences, whether political or theological, were swept under the carpet and no real engagement or discussion took place. At a Methodist and Roman Catholic conference when I was in my early twenties I was told off by other Methodists for asking a question of the Roman Catholic speaker about the bodily assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven. Apparently it was impolite to ask about what divided us!

³² David Ervine and Billy Hutchison spoke warmly of the contact in the study huts with Official IRA prisoners. There was not the same level of contact with the Provisionals. Though the Provisionals, Officials and loyalists all co-operated to fight what was termed the 'big battle' for educational provision by the Open University. Sinnerton, *David Ervine*, p.55 .

³³ Sinnerton, *David Ervine*, p.63.

³⁴ Martin Dillon, *God and the Gun: The Church and Irish Terrorism* (London: Orion, 1997), p.241.

going on in the wider communities of Northern Ireland. The commanders of the various paramilitaries got together to do whatever they could to create a better regime in the prison for their own people. As Spence says, 'We agreed to leave the constitutional situation on one side. We agreed that whatever happened on the outside, it couldn't be allowed to pertain inside. With all the atrocities on both sides, we kept it out of there and that was the first glimmer of hope that we could do business.'³⁵ There was a mutuality of experiences in the prison, that was built on everyday exchanges that paved the way for dialogue during the 1970s and beyond.³⁶ But, the encounter was not just with the other prisoners it was also with some who were reflecting on the reality of the Northern Irish situation. Frank Wright taught history to UVF prisoners in the 1970s.³⁷ Both Ian Paisley and Cardinal O'Fiach visited the UVF prisoners and in the eyes of the loyalist prisoners Paisley compared unfavourably to the Roman Catholic Primate.³⁸

10.6.1.3 The practical outworking of the dominant theological response to the 'Troubles' from the Churches has been one of reconciliation; which concentrates on bringing together individuals so that one can see that the other is not just a 'prod' or a 'fenian' but someone that can be humanised and prejudice reduced.³⁹ Despite the huge amount of resources, money and government support there has been little concrete evidence that violence has been reduced and prejudice lessened. In contrast Shirlow and McEvoy point out how the interactions between ex-Republican and -Loyalist prisoners are characterised by trying to sort out concrete issues like rioting, inter-communal violence and contested marches. They say that, 'The experience of former prisoners suggests that when there is a substantive and practical agenda, a properly structured engagement and identifiable outcomes which are to the benefit of both main communities even the most extreme of former adversaries can engage in real and effective reconciliation work.'⁴⁰ What Shirlow and McEvoy

³⁵ Dillon, *God and the Gun*, p.241.

³⁶ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.140.

³⁷ Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness*, p.79.

³⁸ Sinnerton, *David Ervine*, p.50.

³⁹ For the theological and ecclesiological background to this, see: Maria Power, *From Ecumenism to Community Relations: Inter-Church Relationships in Northern Ireland*.

⁴⁰ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.153.

say can be connected with the contention that Porter offers, albeit from a very different perspective, that political reconciliation in Northern Ireland will only occur when reform becomes primary and that to deliver a reconciled society, we need to be clear about what things we need to do in order to bring it about.⁴¹ So, it is essential that there is a focus on structural change and not just relationships.

10.6.1.4 A sea change that has perhaps begun, but needs to go much further, has been the identification of justice and peace less with the parameters of a particular state, but a sense that there can be a more just arrangement in the particular context in which people find themselves. Justice and peace no longer have to be concomitant with either a thirty two or six county state; but that guaranteed rights, equality, parity can be worked for in the here and now. This is not to say that the parameters of the state cannot change in the future but what is important is the improvement of the quality of life in the present. Both communities have a need for a realised eschatology.⁴² Theologically this is praxis and a critical reflection on praxis as opposed to theology collapsing into psychology which has been the approach of the Churches.

10.6.1.5 In a sense the prisoners have carried out the hope that the Churches had for their work of community relations. Firstly, simple relationships and interactions were built up, where they had never existed before in a deeply segregated society. Secondly, there was an honest engagement on political and religious issues. Thirdly, though agreement on differences was not necessarily reached, a working together on issues of mutual concern thus became possible. The fear of the Churches was that if you implemented the second stage then all the work done in the first stage would be spoilt and as no agreement was possible on the divisive issues of Northern Irish politics was

⁴¹ Norman Porter, *The Elusive Quest: Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2003), pp.240 and 244.

⁴² For Porter the hope and need post-agreement is that:

Released from the yoke of constitutional domination, an emphasis on institutional legitimacy puts the issue of sovereignty and its relation to belonging in a different perspective. The hold of thinking that our sense of belonging is impoverished unless linked to a principle of British or Irish sovereignty is broken; instead, belonging is tied to institutions with which all citizens can identify. Accordingly, the question of constitutional belonging is left open. An institutionally reformed Northern Ireland with developed North-South links, remaining, as the Agreement initially envisages, within the UK may turn out to be the best arrangement for the foreseeable future. Or it may not. Perhaps joining a united Ireland may come to seem an eminently reasonable move. Maybe in a changing European environment neither will be eventually seen as of major consequence. Porter, *The Elusive Quest*, p.253.

possible it was better to leave them. This showed a great lack of faith in the Churches themselves and in the capacity of the people of Northern Ireland to discuss that which divided them in order to find what united them. The result was that the first stage became the be all and end all of reconciliation.

10.6.1.6 A line can be drawn from the encounter and the dialogue in the prisons to the Agreement of 1998, as what happened inside the prisons began to be recreated outside, with contacts beginning to occur between ex-prisoners and the wider communities. Father Alec Reid from Clonard monastery in West Belfast was central in encouraging a theological debate between the Roman Catholic Church and the Republican prisoners.⁴³ For the Republican prisoners one of the educational encounters they had was with liberation theology. Speaking about being in Long Kesh in the mid 1980s, Jim McVeigh a Republican prisoner writes:

I had been asked to draft a document for discussion within the camp as part of our internal education programme. Always interested in other struggles across the globe, we began to encounter the term 'liberation theology' in some of the literature we read. We heard about the emergence of a radical clergy in countries such as South Africa, the Philippines, Nicaragua and Brazil. Romero, Cardinale, Boff; who were these people and what had they to say and was it relevant to our own struggle? ⁴⁴

10.6.1.7 For him one of the fascinations of liberation theology is how it takes theology away from 'the so-called experts' and gives a role to ordinary people. 'It is its radical content and methodology which seeks to encourage the participation of Christians in a process of critical reflection on their society in the light of the Gospel and the Bible, that lends this theology its liberation nature.'⁴⁵ In the 1980s, Gerry Adams produced a basis for the Roman Catholic Church in persuading the IRA to find a way to end the conflict as long as the Church pointed out injustices and the conditions that had led to

⁴³ Dillon, *God and the Gun*, p.265.

⁴⁴ Jim McVeigh, 'The Irish Church and Republicanism - *The need for liberation theology*', *The Furrow* (January 1999), p.3.

⁴⁵ McVeigh, 'The Irish Church and Republicanism', p.5.

violence in the first place. With Alec Reid's direct involvement, John Hume and Gerry Adams began their discussions in 1988 and the Hume/Adam's process is seen as one of the precursors of the ceasefires and the peace process.⁴⁶

10.6.1.8 In the late 1980s, there was a reaching out to the Protestant community from Sinn Fein in terms of trying to understand where the Protestants were coming from. I was part of a group of Protestants who spoke with Sinn Fein in 1990. The discussions were low key, tentative and the sense of the participants was that they were not leading anywhere. Looking back, I can see that the prison experiences were one factor which helped to facilitate a paradigm shift where Republicans were beginning to say that the problem in Northern Ireland was no longer a problem of persuading (or bombing) the British Government to get out and rather the difficulty was the almost one million Protestants who needed to be convinced for Irish unity.⁴⁷ All the thinking done previously about Protestants was along the lines of explaining their 'false consciousness', that once the British left Protestants would suddenly realise where their true allegiances lay. One of our group referred to the political thinking he encountered as an 'It'll be all right on the night approach to Irish unity'.

10.6.1.9 Our main Sinn Fein contact was Tom Hartley, who has recently been Lord Mayor of Belfast. Speaking at the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis (party conference) of 1995 he illustrates the changing thinking about Protestants within the Republican movement. He said, 'In the past our political view ran something like this: if you wish to dislodge northern Protestants from their political ties to the London government, then you must first remove the London government.' He goes on to ask whether this view leads into a *cul de sac* of ignoring the Protestant community and thus paralysis. Furthermore he states,

⁴⁶ Gerry Adams said about Alec Reid:

'We would not, and I've said this about John Hume, but we would not even have the possibility of a peace process if it wasn't for the unstinting, patient, diligent work of a third party. There is no doubt that he was the constant in all of this and in the development of relationships between the key players. He was the key to it and he brought a very special quality to it.' Brian Rowan, *Behind the Lines: The Story of the IRA and Loyalist Ceasefires* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1995), p.165.

⁴⁷ The story of another groups contact with Republicans going on at the same time and with similar conclusions is told in Ronald A. Wells, *Friendship towards Peace: The Journey of Ken Newell and Gerry Reynolds* (Dublin: Columba, 2005), pp.105 -137. 'Sinn Fein's leaders experienced a substantial shift of consciousness' p.117.

This is best summed up in the view that the Protestants will only change when they find themselves in a united Ireland, and that then, of course, they will suddenly come to their senses. In other words we do not need to do anything about the northern Protestants until we get the Brits out. Such a view, in my opinion, makes the Protestants of the north a non-people, to such an extent that they are robbed of their power to be a crucial component of the Irish conflict and indeed to be a crucial component in the search for a just and lasting settlement on this island.⁴⁸

10.6.1.10 On the Loyalist side there was a clear split between the secular socialists around Spence⁴⁹ and the 'religious' Protestants who tended to follow Paisley theologically. This meant that theological dialogue was more difficult with the mainline Churches and/or the ecumenical movement. There was contact with Presbyterian minister Roy Magee playing a similar role to Alec Reid as an intermediary between the loyalist paramilitaries and the British and Irish governments. David Ervine also spoke about contacts that occurred in 1994-1995 with Clonard monastery in West Belfast (home to Alec Reid and Gerry Reynolds) and the Cornerstone Community on the Springfield Road which is an ecumenical community on the peaceline between two Protestant and Roman Catholic heartlands.⁵⁰ However, one exception to the socialist/religious split which is also co-terminus with a city/country distinction⁵¹ within the Loyalist paramilitaries which deserves a mention was Billy Mitchell.

10.6.1.11 Mitchell underwent a conversion experience in the Maze prison whilst serving a sentence for scheduled offences. This was a common enough occurrence for loyalist paramilitaries and normally led to a staunch Protestant fundamentalism. What was unusual was that the life-changing event for Mitchell was watching a television documentary on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This led to the development of a theology which

⁴⁸ Wells, *Friendship towards Peace*, p.117.

⁴⁹ Spence spoke about how for those around him prison meant that God disappeared from the agenda. Dillon, *God and the Gun*, p.233. A Popular Unionist Party Constitution (the political wing of the UVF) written in 1985 contained Clause 4 from the British Labour Party on common ownership of the means of production.

⁵⁰ Sinnerton, *David Ervine*, p.160.

⁵¹ In 1996 the rift between paramilitaries who had a fundamentalist religious outlook (Portadown) and those of a secular socialist bent (Belfast) led to a split within the UVF and the formation of the LVF under the leadership of Billy Wright.

Republican Anthony McIntyre described as a liberation theology borne out of Mitchell's experience of poverty.⁵² He left prison in 1990 with a vision that he summed up in the words of Isaiah 58:4-6 and a belief that the current religious practices of Northern Ireland neglected the poor. Almost uniquely among his religious compatriots he argued that loyalism should be severed from the principle of theocracy and must be 'a secular, pluralist and class-conscious movement'.⁵³ The theological shift in his thinking pre-and post-prison is described as movement from an idealism of 'blood soaked sacrificial altars' to a concentration on 'humanity and human need'.⁵⁴ In language reminiscent of the condemnation of idolatry in *Breaking Down the Enmity*, he speaks of how making the political connection with the United Kingdom an essential element for the Protestant faith is 'an offence against the Holy Trinity'.⁵⁵ This is a very large step for someone who represented an organisation, the UVF, whose motto was 'For God and Ulster'. Just before his death, he initiated contacts with Roman Catholic priests in the area where he lived and worked in order to explore ways of improving the everyday quality of life of local Roman Catholics. Although there was critical theological reflection on the loyalist side, it was very much a minority position between the secular socialists and the religious fundamentalists. However, it did exist and as such should be recognised.

10.6.2 Liminality

10.6.2.1 Reflecting on prison, terms like confinement, locked up, tend to spring to mind. One of the most important features of the prison experience of Northern Ireland has been the importance of the physical space of imprisonment for facilitating the thinking and reflection that went on there. Prison proved to be a place where an unlikely space was found where the prisoners were able to encounter the 'other' probably for the first

⁵² Details about Billy Mitchell are taken from: Garland, Roy 'Billy Mitchell's Theology' [http://www.pup-ni.org.uk/loyalism/lo_read.aspx?a=24] First Published 15 August 2006, (Accessed: 1st September 2006)

⁵³ Original quote taken from article by Billy Mitchell on the PUP website <http://www.pup-ni.org.uk/>, now no longer available. Quote appears in: Richard Darmody, 'Loyalism in Northern Ireland', *Theology* Vol. CIV No.822 (2001), p.415.

⁵⁴ Garland, Roy 'Billy Mitchell's Theology' [http://www.pup-ni.org.uk/loyalism/lo_read.aspx?a=24] First Published 15 August 2006.

⁵⁵ Richard Darmody, 'Loyalism in Northern Ireland', *Theology* Vol. CIV No.822 (2001), p.415.

time. There will not be too much focus on the nature of the physicality of prison space. That certainly had an impact on the interactions that happened within confinement. For example, when a new cell system was introduced in the Maze prison, replacing the old compounds, contact between Republicans and Loyalists became much more limited. Rather it is important to focus on the idea that the space that emerged in Northern Irish prisons is what Geraldine Smyth referred to it as a 'liminal space'.⁵⁶

10.6.2.2 The concept of liminality is rooted in the Latin word *limen*, meaning "threshold".

The contemporary use of the term comes from anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner in their descriptions of transitions involved in rites of passage.⁵⁷ It is the experience of leaving one place, having not yet arrived at the other. It is the sense of being "between and betwixt". Using the Latin origin of liminal we could say that such experiences are 'threshold' experiences which enable, or even force, the creating of new identities and the questioning and the ultimate shedding of old ones.

10.6.2.3 It is very easy to find literature on the experience of prison which talks of

'liminality', 'liminal stages' and 'liminal spaces'. 'Jail is among many other things, a liminal space. It is a place of crisis, a place where the life narratives of those who have been incarcerated are ruptured.'⁵⁸ The connection of liminality with prison experience is not necessarily a moral one. Liminality in prison can be a good/bad or probably more realistically a mixed experience. Much of the literature focussing on prison life in a wider context than Northern Ireland, lists a number of effects of imprisonment which make sobering reading: these include things like problems with mental and physical health, employment difficulties, relationship issues, coping with non-insitutional life on the outside.⁵⁹ Ex-prisoners in Northern Ireland suffer the same

⁵⁶ Private conversation with the author *Friday 7th September 2007*.

⁵⁷ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960) and Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 94-130.

⁵⁸ Anne, Folwell, Stanford, 'More than just words, women's poetry and resistance at cook county jail' [http://www.goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-3543151/More-than-just-words-women.html#abstract] First Published 22 June 2004. On prison as a liminal state, Alison Liebling and Shadd Maruna, *The Effects of Imprisonment* (Cambridge: Willan, 2005), p.239 and on a stage of liminality when you enter prison, John Harvey, *Young Men in Prison: Surviving and adapting to life inside* (Cambridge: Willan, 2006), p.58.

⁵⁹ Generic literature cited in Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.80.

things, the difference being that as politically motivated prisoners, in general, they have better levels of support from community and family.⁶⁰

10.6.2.4 One of the positive aspects of liminality, in terms of the losing of some self identity, would seem to be the possibilities provided for personal change of a significant kind. This may go some way to explain the number of religious and indeed political conversions in prison. Senator George Mitchell, who chaired the process that led to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 said:

I think one of the great lessons out of this whole process, which may be incidental to the result but nonetheless important in human terms, is the capacity for human redemption. The ability of people who have made serious tragic errors, violent errors, committed brutal atrocities, to accept responsibility, to be punished for it, to accept that punishment and then change...genuinely change.⁶¹

10.6.2.5 The 1998 Agreement has provided a liminal space for the whole community in Northern Ireland. As an event, as opposed to the details of the Agreement, what it did was clearly mark a transition time in Northern Irish society. All sections of the communities are having to change, to reluctantly perhaps experience conversion; but the first group that realised that need for change and conversion was the politically motivated prisoners.

10.6.2.6 It has been more difficult for ex-prisoners to find a liminal space (in the sense of encountering ex-prisoners from the 'other' community) outside prison. There was a desire to continue the co-operation that had sprung up in prison on the outside. Sadly, the idea of a 'downtown' office to facilitate resettlement and co-ordination on prisoner issues was abandoned in 1976 with the introduction of the 'criminalisation' policy of the British government. Perhaps the most interesting subsequent initiative was PROPP (Progressive Release of Political Prisoners) brought about through the initiative of the small Quaker community.

⁶⁰ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.81.

⁶¹ *The Loyalists, Episode 3, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) 1999.*

In 1990, Marie Rafferty, a Quaker and social worker who worked in the Quaker Family Centre at the Maze, approached some Loyalist and Republican former prisoners and asked them if they had encountered any difficulties since their release. During separate discussions Rafferty recognised that each side had similar concerns about the needs presented by release after prolonged imprisonment and the lack of resources to address them. The Quaker movement in Northern Ireland had recognised that politically motivated former prisoners would have difficulties working with state agencies. Rafferty suggested that Republican and Loyalist former prisoners should co-operate in providing a forum to articulate the problems and difficulties faced by former prisoners returning to their families and communities.⁶²

10.6.2.7 The aim was that the group would begin by looking at purely prisoner related issues and then move onto political issues effecting the whole community.⁶³ The first meeting of the group was in 1991, in the midst of ongoing violence. PROPP is not seen as a success, but as a missed opportunity. It failed because both Loyalist and Republicans continued to develop their own ex-prisoners' organisations and there was a lack of a shared political analysis with Republicans looking to the relationship between themselves and the British state and the loyalists focussing on the Republican/Loyalist axis. 'Although the dialogue that took place helped to develop relationships, some of which still endure' the unrealised potential of the group to transform the conflict and strengthen the peace process did not happen.⁶⁴ What a shame that other Churches did not attempt to provide 'liminal spaces' for those from the most deprived of our communities as the prisons did; another opportunity missed.

⁶² Peter Shirlow, Brian Graham, Kieran McEvoy, Felim O hAdhmaill, Dawn Purvis, *Politically Motivated Former Prisoner Groups: Community Activism and Conflict Transformation . A Research Report submitted to the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council* (Belfast: NICRC, 2005), p.32.

⁶³ Shirlow, Graham, McEvoy, O hAdhmaill, Purvis, *Politically Motivated Former Prisoner Groups*, p.33.

⁶⁴ Shirlow, Graham, McEvoy, O hAdhmaill, Purvis, *Politically Motivated Former Prisoner Groups*, p.36.

10.6.3 Victims or Victimised?

10.6.3.1 Gormally writing about prisoners in Northern Ireland says, 'From the point of view of the state and its supporters, they are the perpetrators of numerous atrocities, the enemies of democracy and civilisation incarnate.'⁶⁵ Much of the debate about prisoners and especially concerning the early release of prisoners as part of the 1998 Agreement has concentrated on the effect that this would have on the victims.⁶⁶ One of the scandals of the Northern Irish situation was that there was very little support or compensation given to victims of the violence until it became an issue in the peace process. Moreover, there has been much argument in Northern Ireland over the status of 'victim'. Rolston writes, 'In short, within the general ignorance and lack of official acknowledgment of victims in the past, the case of victims of state violence was even worse. They were not merely ignored, but there was a determination to exclude them and those who raised their plight from the debate.'⁶⁷ He expresses the hope that peace will give the political space to be able allow what he terms 'the forgotten victims' to a

⁶⁵ Gormally, *Conversion from War to Peace*, p.6.

⁶⁶ 'Under the terms of the 1998 Agreement ... , all qualifying paramilitary prisoners belonging to organisations on ceasefire were to be released from prison within two years. Although the numbers released under these provisions constituted only a small percentage of 'activists' imprisoned as a result of the conflict, the decision remains controversial. To date 449 prisoners have been released (196 Loyalist, 241 Republican and 12 non-aligned) under the provisions of the 1998 Agreement.' Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.2. In terms of the success or not of the releases the level of recidivism has been minuscule and 'Almost uniquely amongst the various institutions arising from the Agreement, it delivered 'on time'. Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.51.

⁶⁷ Bill Rolston, 'Introduction: Victims, Truth and Prejudice', in *Unfinished Business - State Killings and the Quest for Truth* (ed. B. Rolston with M. Gilmartin; Belfast: BTP, 2000), p.xii.

find a place in public discussion.⁶⁸

10.6.3.2 The role and contribution of prisoners and the organisations they represent to the peace process in Northern Ireland should not be idealised in any way. Sometimes there is an unwillingness from ex - prisoners and their organisations to acknowledge that they did torture, shoot, kill and bomb and not just against what they themselves would class as 'legitimate targets'. I have witnessed a smug self-righteousness from ex - prisoners under the rubric that their armed struggle was justified either to defend Ulster or liberate it. Some former prisoners have become involved in individual acts of violence and criminality. One of the organisations that benefited from early release (Ulster Defence Association) has largely become a criminal drugs gang. The members of the respective paramilitary organisations have also been involved in punishment attacks. Though in the past five years there has been a considerable decline in the numbers attacked and an increase in restorative justice schemes run by ex-prisoners.⁶⁹

10.6.3.3 However, two things need to be said. Firstly, many of the ex-prisoners can be classed as victims themselves in terms of what they and their families have suffered. The research of Shirlow and McEvoy has shown that:

⁶⁸ Rolston, 'Introduction: Victims, Truth and Prejudice', p.xiii. On Monday 28th January 2007 four commissioners for victims and survivors of the troubles were appointed by the Northern Ireland Assembly. There was only supposed to be one commissioner but after a year of wrangling four were appointed. They are Bertha McDougal, whose police reservist husband Lindsay was murdered by the INLA in Belfast in 1981. She previously served as the Interim Victims Commissioner. Patricia MacBride, whose brother Tony was one of two IRA members killed along with a member of the SAS near the border in Co Fermanagh in 1984. Brendan McAllister, the director of Mediation Northern Ireland and Mike Nesbitt, a former television news anchorman. Their job description is as follows (though note it is written in the singular!) The overall aim of the Commissioner will be to promote the interests of victims and survivors of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The duties of the Commissioner will be to:

(a) promote an awareness of matters relating to the interests of victims and survivors and of the need to safeguard those interests;

(b) keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting the interests of victims and survivors;

(c) keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for victims and survivors (this will include services provided by statutory and voluntary organisations);

(d) provide advice on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors to the Executive Committee of the Assembly and any organisation or person providing services for victims and survivors;

(e) take reasonable steps to ensure that the views of victims and survivors are sought concerning the exercise by the Commissioner of his or her functions; and

(f) make arrangements for a forum for consultation and discussion with victims and survivors.

[Http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/jobdescription07.pdf](http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/jobdescription07.pdf)

Hopefully, all will now feel included.

⁶⁹ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.136.

...a third of Loyalist and Republican former prisoners lost a family member as a result of political violence. Furthermore, a third of Republican relatives had members of their families killed, compared to 17.8 per cent of Loyalist relatives. Given that deaths in the Troubles equated to 0.25 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland, it is evident that the former prisoner community experienced a far greater intensity of direct violence and experience of loss.⁷⁰

Adding to this is the fact that the majority of ex-prisoners live within areas of great social need, with some estimates suggesting that former prisoners make up one in four of those unemployed and living in west Belfast.⁷¹ Also the majority of those imprisoned were incarcerated either as youths or young men in their early to mid-twenties.⁷²

10.6.3.4 Secondly, despite the assertions of the Unionist parties during the peace process and after the early release of prisoners under the 1998 agreement, there is no consensus among victims as to whether the early release of prisoners was right and/or justified. Indeed, there is a need in Northern Ireland for politicians and Churches to move away from an ongoing narrative of innocence and blamelessness. This is true of Unionist politicians who cynically tolerated violence for Unionism and then preached law and order after the fact. It is also true of Churches who acquiesced in a hierarchy of victimhood that disenfranchised those who were the recipients of state violence. I would echo the appeal of Shirlow and McEvoy for a movement beyond 'uni-dimensional notions of perpetrators and victims, with little room for acknowledgement that many individuals in conflict-affected communities may at times have direct experiences of both.'⁷³

⁷⁰ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.85.

⁷¹ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.88.

⁷² Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.80.

⁷³ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.85.

10.6.4 How Shall We Name Them?

10.6.4.1 Theologically then how should we characterise the positive role of some prisoners, which has seen the most bitter of enemies engage in substantive and real reconciliation work, in many ways far beyond that which the Churches have been able to carry out? There were a few voices within the Churches who refused to demonise prisoners, ex-prisoners and their organisations and blame them completely for the conflict.⁷⁴ As we have said *Irish Kairos* stated a view of paramilitary groups within Northern Ireland which had not been heard previously from an inter-Church group: saying that paramilitaries provide signs of the Kingdom of God when they do certain things like striving after justice and being a voice for the voiceless.⁷⁵ In terms of the politically motivated prisoners going ahead of their communities, while not leaving them behind, it would not be an exaggeration to see some of the work done as being 'prophetic'. Especially on the Loyalist side one can see the immense contribution a group of ex-prisoners made in getting their organisations on ceasefire; 'their experience speaks directly to the capacity of a relatively small number of individuals with patience, credibility and goodwill to tilt the conflict transformation axis'.⁷⁶ This is truly prophetic.

10.6.4.2 Stevens writing about 'go-between people' in Northern Ireland talks about how particular experiences they have had enabled them to fulfill that role. One of the examples he gives is Rev Ray Davey who founded the Corrymeela Community of reconciliation. Davey was a prisoner of war under the Germans and was outside Dresden in 1945 when it was fire bombed by the allies. Stevens states, 'This provided the impetus for his subsequent ministry of reconciliation.'⁷⁷ It is fascinating, that at the heart of the most prominent Church based project of reconciliation in Northern Ireland lies the experience of a prisoner. The idea of 'go-between people' suggests a passive

⁷⁴ One of the clergy who met with the IRA at Feakle, the Anglican Bishop of Connor, Dr Butler said: 'We were all most impressed with their attitude, with their fairmindedness, and we were so pleased to find that they were talking seriously and deeply and with great conviction and had listened carefully to what we had to say' *Irish Times*, 13 December 1974

⁷⁵ *Irish kairos* p.23

⁷⁶ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.146.

⁷⁷ David Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation* (Dublin: Columba, 2004), p.79.

picture of someone who passes on messages without being too involved. A little bit like the shuttle diplomacy that occurred before the 1998 Agreement, when the Unionists would not sit in the same room as Sinn Fein and position papers etc. were passed from one room to the other. Better the role of Alec Reid who saw 'his Christian role as the interpreter of each to all.'⁷⁸ An interpreter needs to be fluent in the language of the people he or she is with. One of the reasons he was respected and welcomed as an interpreter was that as a Priest he refused to condemn his parishioners, many of whom he knew were in the IRA. This was in contrast to his Bishop Cahal Daly, who was a thorn in the side of the IRA in terms of condemnation of their violence and was applauded by the wider Church for his stance. So much of the condemnation game in Northern Ireland denied any culpability in the production and maintenance of political violence. Alec Reid was also determined not to be seen to condone the violence and also to find a way of ending it. The factors which we said prisoners brought to peacemaking of credibility, respect and legitimacy, factors Alec Reid was able to embody in his own community, meant Alec Reid was able to play the role he did. Because former prisoners have both endured and inflicted violence, some of them have developed the capacity to be interpreters of and for their communities, which are the most segregated and damaged by the conflict.

10.7 Conclusion: Getting Dirty Hands

10.7.1 Gary Mason, a Methodist Minister, based on the Newtownards Road in Belfast has exercised much of his ministry working with Loyalist ex - prisoners. Indeed he took a group of them to Auschwitz to show them where the logical end of their attitude to Roman Catholics lay. He says that if the Church is serious in having a role and a presence in the working class communities of Northern Ireland it must be prepared to work with the ex - prisoners and get 'dirty hands'.⁷⁹

10.7.2. This plea for getting 'dirty hands' is very reminiscent of Bonhoeffer's 'view from below':

⁷⁸ Wells, *Friendship towards Peace*, p.123.

⁷⁹ Private conversation with the author 4th November 2004.

There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled - in short, from the perspective of those who suffer. The important thing is that neither bitterness nor envy should have gnawed at the heart during this time, that we should have come to look with new eyes at matters great and small, sorrow and joy, strength and weakness, that our perception of generosity, humanity, justice and mercy should have become clearer, freer, less corruptible. We have to learn that personal suffering is a more effective key, a more rewarding principle for exploring the world in thought and action than personal good fortune. This perspective from below must not become the partisan possession of those who are eternally dissatisfied; rather, we must do justice to life in all its dimensions from a higher satisfaction, whose foundation is beyond any talk of 'from below' or 'from above'. This is the way in which we may affirm it.⁸⁰

10.7.3 Much of the role that the Churches has played during the troubles can be seen as desire to keep clean hands and not be blamed. Smyth laments that the Churches in Northern Ireland 'are not to be found at the heart of the human action and passion, in the zones of marginality where people cry out for healing and new life.'⁸¹ Then, she finishes with a plea that the Churches need to 'discover themselves with others on the edge'.⁸² For Shirlow and McEvoy, the best of the Loyalist and Republican former prisoners have shown how a properly grounded reconciliation can begin from the extremes or from the edge.⁸³ If the Churches could also find themselves here we may see the development of a theology that is truly, contextual, incarnational and effective.

⁸⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM, 1984), p.17.

⁸¹ Smyth, 'In the Middle Ground and Meantime', p.105.

⁸² Smyth, 'In the Middle Ground and Meantime', p.106.

⁸³ Shirlow and McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire*, p.153.

CONCLUSION

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

The story has two versions. In the first, a Viking war party in a lean, dragon-headed longboat closes with the coast of northern Ireland. It is hunting priests' gold and red-haired, smooth-skinned slaves. The leader of the fierce Northmen urges on his warriors: the first man to touch the sweet Gaelic strand with his hand or foot takes possession of it. He gets to keep whatever is there-precious metal, cattle, women, boys. There is a man aboard the longboat called O'Neill. It is an Irish name and, perhaps, in the style of slitherly allegiances in Ireland, he is a turncoat. He has abandoned his family and sept and gone over to the Norse raiders, wilder even than the wild Irish. This man desires plunder and the haven of his own piece of land. It seems he craves those things more than reason, certainly more than any Viking aboard. As the longboat approaches the shore, the crew strains for the jump and its prize. Then O'Neill, the man from Ireland, lays his arm along the bulwark. He severs his hand with one swift sword blow and throws it ashore onto the sand before anyone else can make the leap. His viking chief keeps his word. He gives that part of Ulster to his mutilated mercenary, and O'Neill takes the bloody hand as his crest and symbol.

In the second version of the story, two rival Scottish clans race each other to Ireland across the twelve miles of the wind-whipped North Channel. They have agreed that whichever reaches the Ulster shore first will take the land. The leader of the McDonnells lusts for it just as O'Neill did-like the intense desire some men have to keep living when death comes to claim them. He'll do anything for it. But his boat lags behind and he sees beautiful, wild Ulster, rich in cattle and slaves, sliding away from him. He severs his hand with one

swift sword blow and throws it ashore onto the sand. He claims the land for himself and takes the red hand as the crest of the MacDonnells of Antrim.¹

It seems that the mythological origins of Northern Ireland set the standard for a subsequent history that is both contested and bloody. In our first chapter, we examined the Protestant Exodus-Promised Land-Covenant tradition and the Roman Catholic Victim-Resurrection-Martyr tradition. Both religious narratives combine history, myth and faith. We saw that both these theological traditions continue to be pervasive and powerful as they continue to justify both sectarianism, violence and injustice. As Smyth says, 'selective memories are mythically laden via quasi-religious re-enactments.'²

In relation to the strength of 'the sacral power of cultural religion' there is a real sense that during the 'Troubles' the Churches could not compete with these dominant images.³ While the conflict was ongoing there was no evidence that a fearful and timid theology of reconciliation won over hearts and minds. The great challenge for ecumenical theology, to which it was never able to rise, mainly because it remained silent about unjust structures and practices during the 'Troubles, was to provide cross cutting theological language, a new framework of understanding that can operate in the same context as what we have termed the cult of death and function as powerfully at the symbolic level.

Post-1994 and the beginning of the peace process, across the board in terms of theological writing, there has been a concentration on using the Trinity, and thus the insights of Rahner, Moltmann and Celtic theology, as a theological picture to inspire and facilitate a new community of Protestants and Catholics living together in Northern Ireland. For Lennon, the Trinity provides a fundamental challenge, 'if we cannot build community with each other we cannot be in community with God.'⁴

Nonetheless while we may have a peace agreement, Northern Irish society has settled

¹ Story retold by D.Lundy, *Men that God made Mad: A Journey Through Truth, Myth and Terror in Northern Ireland* (London: Vintage, 2007), p.7.

² Geraldine Smyth, 'Peace Ten Years On - Where are the Churches now?', in *Beyond Sectarianism? The Churches and Ten Years of the Peace Process* (Belfast: Profile Publishing, 2004), p.32.

³ Geraldine Smyth, 'Peace Ten Years On - Where are the Churches now?', in *Beyond Sectarianism? The Churches and Ten Years of the Peace Process*, p.32.

⁴ Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.50.

into a state of 'benign apartheid' and is still bitterly divided.⁵ As H. Richard Neihbuhr points out

...where common memory is lacking, where men (sic) do not share in the same past there can be no real community, and where community is to be formed common memory must be created...The measure of our distance from each other in our nations and our groups can be taken by noting the divergence, the separateness and the lack of sympathy in our social memories. Conversely, the measure of our unity is the extent of our common memory.⁶

How do we gain a common memory? If we cannot do it through our hegemonic theological meta-narratives, how can we help individuals and communities follow the journey of Billy Mitchell from "blood soaked sacrificial altars" to a concentration on 'humanity and human need'?⁷

As someone who has been away from Northern Ireland for just over nine years now, I would be going against everything that I believe in theologically and politically if I was to pontificate from a distance telling the Churches what they should be up to. However, I wrote this thesis because I was interested in exploring both the causes and the consequences of the 'Troubles' from a theological point of view. In my frequent visits 'home', I am still convinced that as we have not understood the causes of the 'Troubles', so we are still dealing with the consequences.

My view of the causes and consequences of the 'Troubles' is that the conflict was a religious one, but religion also functions as a strong ethnic boundary and the conflict has colonial dimensions. We have examined the record of the state; specifically examining the way the Roman Catholic minority were treated. Under the Stormont Government the record was what was termed 'institutionalised partiality', while post-Stormont the British Government has been responsible for a number of human rights

⁵ J.Morrow, *On the Road of Reconciliation: A Brief Memoir*, p.83.

⁶ Quoted by Charles Villa-Vicencio, 'Liberation and Reconstruction: the unfinished agenda', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (ed. Christopher Rowland; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.169.

⁷ Garland, Roy 'Billy Mitchell's Theology' [http://www.pup-ni.org.uk/loyalism/lo_read.aspx?a=24] First Published 15 August 2006,(Accessed: 1st September 2006).

abuses and indeed further revelations have been occurring as we write. The Churches should have been much more suspicious and critical of the state (whether Stormont or post-Stormont than they were). The record of the state in Northern Ireland was almost completely ignored by the Churches, except the Roman Catholic Church on occasions, individually and collectively, as having no relevance to theology.

In terms of the Churches, the build up to the 'Troubles' was clearly characterised for demands for justice in political, social and economic areas of community of life and yet no concrete theological response was given to this. Then the central concern both politically and theologically post 1968-69 became the communal violence and what measures should be used to alleviate and control it. The Churches presented the conflict as an ethnic one (determined to show the world that they were not responsible) and behaved as if it was a religious one (in terms of papers produced, etc.) and refused to see any colonial element at all. An honest examination of all the causes and consequences of the 'Troubles' should have provided the raw material for a political theology or a theology of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland.

We looked at three different 'ecumenical' responses to the 'Troubles'. The reason that we chose ecumenical responses is the hope that the coming together of various Christian traditions might provide a language of dealing with the 'Troubles' that might be appropriated by the wider community. There is no sign that this occurred. One document, *Breaking Down the Enmity*, stressed reconciliation. One, *For God and His Glory Alone*, stressed citizenship. One, *Irish Kairos*, stressed justice. None of these responses were adequate on their own.

Forrester reminds us that four aspects of the context are particularly important for modern political theology: ideology, the economic and political structure of society, the Church and the historical moment.⁸ In none of the theologies surveyed were these four elements held together. *Irish Kairos* came closest to examining the things that I was passionate about. However, as a document and a process it came to nothing. It could not even find a printer. This was due to the comparison with South Africa which many Irish Christians considered to be invalid and offensive. Even more

⁸ D. Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, p.151.

controversial was seeing the paramilitaries as a sign of the kingdom of God, which by some was deemed as support for IRA violence. Though some paramilitaries did show themselves to be signs of the Kingdom of God.

A political theology of the 'Troubles', in order to capture the complexity of the conflict, would have needed to be one of reconciliation (to deal with the ethnic and religious dimensions of the problem with the resultant sectarianism, intolerance and violence); one of liberation (to deal with the discrimination, the intolerance, the abuses of human rights) and of course ecumenical to have had the possibility of creating some inclusive narratives for the two, or more, communities.

This theology, outlined above, must be at least possible and may still be desirable in the post-agreement that the Churches find themselves in. Lennon speaks of how:

...a theology of reconciliation, which must also be just, is essential as well as making use of the method and assumptions of a theology of liberation. To define the poor or deprived in Northern Ireland is not possible without including both nationalist and unionist poor. The reality is that we will all remain victims to a degree in Northern Ireland until a theology of reconciliation, as well as one of liberation, becomes much more central in social, political and ecclesiastical life.⁹

There was a neglect of social and economic aspects of justice during the 'Troubles', and indeed before, as the most basic political question of all that of the legitimacy of the state was the one that was unresolved. This was always the dilemma of developing any class based socialist politics in Northern Ireland. For Lennon, 'A theology of reconciliation can easily be misused to overlook or neglect the rights of those who are economically deprived.'¹⁰ While Power speaking of the Corrymeela Community, which is the largest Christian ecumenical reconciliation group, points out how they have failed to address 'some of the social aspects of the Gospel, such as

⁹ Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.160.

¹⁰ Lennon, *After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland*, p.160.

deprivation'.¹¹ Sadly, the poor are still with us. A report from 2006 highlighted what they term 'A particularly stark fact' which is 'that people who live in workless households, whether Catholic or Protestant, have not benefited from the economic up-turn that others have experienced.'¹² It seems that the liberationist perspective of concern and justice for the poor and oppressed still needs to be heard. In relation to this theology it is not just contextual, it is also intercontextual and so Northern Ireland still has much to learn from South Africa, Latin America, Korea, Bosnia and other places.

Finally, I want to say that any criticism implied of Churches and ecumenical groups is implied of myself because I was part of both during the 'Troubles'. Things have moved on, changes have taken place that I never thought I would see in my lifetime; Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness together in government commonly known as the 'Chuckle Brothers' because they are always seen laughing together. There is still controversy about the past and uncertainty about the future, as dissidents continue to attack the Security Forces, though still a deal of hope exists. But, 'This struggle, for symbols that unite and stories that bind, has only just begun.'¹³

As Frayling reminds us,

None of us can escape the consequences of our history. We have to live with them, but we can seek to understand it better, and thereby begin to heal personal and social memories. In Ireland, perhaps more than anywhere else, the churches must provide the resources of vision and hope, underpinned by Scripture, in order to help people find a new way forward, a way in which the poor will no longer cry out for justice while the well-off cry for peace.¹⁴

¹¹ Power, *From Ecumenism to Community Relations: Inter Church Relationships in Northern Ireland 1980-2005*, p.177.

¹² CAJ, *Equality in Northern Ireland: The Rhetoric and the Reality* (Belfast: Committee on the Administration of Justice, 2006), p.65.

¹³ Charles Villa-Vicencio, 'Liberation and Reconstruction: the unfinished agenda', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (ed. Christopher Rowland; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.169.

¹⁴ Nicholas Frayling, *Pardon and Peace: a Reflection on the Making of Peace in Ireland* (London: SPCK, 1996), p.98.

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APPENDIX 1

Conclusions of the Inter-Church report, *Violence in Ireland*¹

1. In spite of the complicated historical and social issues involved and without prejudice to any legitimate political aim, we find unanimously that there is no justification in the present situation in Ireland for the existence of any para-military organisations.
2. It follows that we see no justification for the campaigns of bombing and killing being carried out in Northern Ireland, in the Republic of Ireland and in Britain.
3. We uphold the right of any group to express its views in peaceful demonstration and in seeking electoral support.
4. We recommend that the Churches actively support peace and reconciliation movements.
5. While we recognise that the authorities can make mistakes or be guilty of abuses, we recommend that the Churches jointly remind their members that they have a *prima facie* moral obligation to support the currently constituted authorities in Ireland against all paramilitary powers and that to do so is not in any way to prejudge longer-term political and constitutional developments. In particular, where an individual has information about violent activities of paramilitary organisations he or she may be assuming a personal moral responsibility if, after taking account of all the personal, family and other dangers involved, he does not put such information before the authorities. Furthermore the Churches should be prepared to offer strictly confidential advice through their clergy to their members when faced with these terrible questions.
6. We recommend that the Churches support the principle of a Bill of Rights to protect minorities. We are in favour of extending the functions of the Commissioner of Complaints in Northern Ireland.
7. We suggest the setting up of a Christian Centre of Social Investigation which would conduct research into problems underlying social and communal unrest and would monitor continuously progress made in removing the basic grievances of discrimination and injustice within civil society that are related to the occurrence of violence. Other problems to be investigated underlie our further recommendations and they are problems which must not be shelved if such a centre cannot be established.
8. We recommend action by the Churches to ensure that their worship is not exploited by paramilitary organisations at funerals and commemorations.
9. We recommend all possible support for the family as a social unit, both through Christian pastoral care and through practical measures set out in the report.
10. We recommend urgent experiment and enterprise in the Youth Service designed to make an appeal to those sections of youth hitherto not attracted to its activities. We urge further effort to establish and maintain interdenominational activities for youth.
11. We hold that that the Churches should set an example to society in the place they give to women thus encouraging them to take their rightful confident place in society.
12. We call for a sustained and far reaching programme of education within the Churches themselves by which their members may be made more aware of the political and social implications of Christianity for Irish society as well as of the democratic methods available for promoting justice and peace.
13. We urge upon the attention of the Joint Committee appointed to monitor mixed marriages the special circumstances existing in Northern Ireland.
14. We recommend the establishment of a Joint Committee to consider closer contact and co-operation between Roman Catholic and other schools.
15. We regard the growth of community awareness in many areas as potentially one of the more positive developments of recent years and we urge local congregations to make every effort to play a part in these developments.
16. We suggest that all political leaders should be encouraged to see their task as that of reaching a just agreement with their opponents rather than of achieving victory over them; and that to this end they should be open to any reasonable settlement proposed.

¹ Report on violence appointed by the Irish Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Joint Group on Social Questions (1976) pp.90-93.