

WHERE I SENSED THE BREATH OF GOD

WHERE I SENSED

*The
Breath
of
GOD*

A FOOTNOTE IN ANGLO-IRISH HISTORY

Dr. Roddy Evans

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Father Christopher McCarthy, C.Ss.R. 1911–1983

‘Father Christy McCarthy, of Clonard Monastery, has what he calls a “dazzling vision” of what England and Ireland, working together, could do for the rest of the world. What hope and fresh direction these two nations, united, could give to every hopeless situation in the world.’

Leslie Fox, All Saints Church, Dulwich, quoted in *The Irish Times*
18th November 1981

FOREWORD

IT IS RARE AMONG the Protestant community in Ireland to find an exploration of the ethical problems of our history. It is much more comfortable, either to adopt a posture of defiance, or, where events have made that impossible, a discreet silence, as if nothing that required explanation or expiation had happened.

Nevertheless, a small evangelical group, inspired by the ideals of Moral Re-Armament, from both North and South, led by the late Dr. George Dallas, a Presbyterian, who gave evidence to the New Ireland Forum, did try to come to grips with the moral legacy of history.

Roderick Evans' Memoir is an addition to a small body of literature on the movement, which may come to a greater significance in the future. It takes a lot of courage and a sense of Christian duty to look at uncomfortable questions, which most people would rather ignore or pass over.

History will highlight the special importance of Clonard Monastery in the coming of peace to Ireland. The Memoir describes the individuals involved, and the reflective exercises that took place at an awful time, when many lives were being lost in cruel circumstances.

This is an account by one witness of what Christian people can do in such a situation, and even with the coming of peace many of the underlying moral problems still await further analysis and resolution.

Martin Mansergh

21st March 2002

INTRODUCTION

A Brief Historical Outline

THE FOLLOWING IS an attempt to account for the movements in history that culminated in thirty years of civil war in Northern Ireland.

From the earliest years, the involvement of the English Crown in Ireland has always been at 'one remove'. The oligarchy that ruled Ireland on behalf of the Crown was English until the sixteenth century. The historian W.E.H. Lecky wrote 'The English rule was concentrated in the narrow limits of the Pale. Like a spearhead in the living body, it inflamed all around it and deranged every vital function.'

As Europe's seafaring empires rose and sea-lanes opened up, England's fears of Catholic France and Spain sharpened: thus the Reformation was an opportunity for the English to maintain control of Catholic Ireland. However, over a period of time, the definition of the ruling oligarchy ceased to be solely English and became also Protestant. This ruling elite established itself in Ireland and was subsequently known as the 'Protestant Ascendancy'.

At the close of the eighteenth century, the revolutionary ideals that spawned the American War of Independence and the French Revolution ignited the 1798 revolution in Ireland. This was inspired by the Protestant leader Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen and the aim of this rebellion by Irish Catholics and Presbyterians was to overthrow the Ascendancy and usher in a more just government. However, the crushing of the rebellion was followed by the Act of Union, which established the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. That Act is still extant and lies at the root of the present situation in Northern Ireland.

The great Irish potato famine of the 1840s led to a million deaths and a further million went into exile, mainly to America. The trauma of that event sharpened Irish nationalist feeling and this was reflected throughout the Irish diaspora, especially in the U.S.A. In the mid-nineteenth century, just before the great famine, Daniel O'Connell the Liberator, attempted to repeal the Act of Union, without success. However, he did succeed in achieving Catholic emancipation, conceded reluctantly by an English government led by the Duke of Wellington.

Under the Act of Union of 1800, the governance of Ireland was the responsibility of the Westminster parliament, and the Protestant Ascendancy was the means of that governance.

W.E. Gladstone was the first English political statesman to realise that such a system of government was far from satisfactory. He voiced his concerns in the following historic words

‘There is the Church of Ireland, there is the land of Ireland, there is the education of Ireland. There are many subjects, all of which depend on one that is greater than them all: there are so many branches from the one trunk and that trunk is the tree of what is called the Protestant Ascendancy. We therefore aim at the destruction of the system of Ascendancy. It is still there, like a great tree of noxious growth, lifting its head and poisoning the land as far as its shadow can extend.’

Edmund Burke described the Protestant Ascendancy as ‘pure and perfect malice ... as to religion, it has nothing to do with the proceedings.’ However, W.E.H. Lecky wrote ‘Of all class tyrannies, the most odious is the one which rests on religious distinctions and is envenomed by religious animosities.’

From 1886 to 1918, the Westminster parliament was in continuous turmoil, as Parnell, leader of the Irish Party in the House of Commons, and his successors, attempted to secure a Home Rule Bill to establish an Irish parliament in Dublin. Three Bills were introduced but all failed. These failures fuelled the Irish physical force tradition that led directly to the Easter Rising in 1916, and the Anglo-Irish war from 1919 to 1921. These were followed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which in turn sparked a bloody civil war across Ireland. The six counties of Northern Ireland were offered devolution, while remaining part of the United Kingdom: this became the Government of Ireland Act of 1920.

However, even as late as 1941, Winston Churchill remarked ‘Juridically, we have never recognised that Southern Ireland is an independent sovereign state.’ In contrast, Austin Chamberlain, one of the signatories of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty is reported as saying ‘Northern Ireland is an illogical and indefensible compromise.’ He realised that the constitutional acts passed at that time were temporary compromises. However, they did succeed in

getting the ‘troublesome’ Irish question out of Westminster affairs for the next fifty years.

The temporary nature of the arrangements was bound to lead to change. The question is, why did it take fifty years before Northern Ireland finally disintegrated? It is a fact that the situation in Northern Ireland from its inception did not facilitate the growth of a Catholic nationalist middle class, resulting in a community lacking any effective leadership. It was not until the application of the 1947 Butler Education Act to Northern Ireland that both young Catholics and Protestants were enabled to benefit from university education. The explosion in Northern Ireland was triggered by Catholic university students initiating a civil rights movement for justice and equality of treatment in 1968. This coincided with the student riots in America and France.

Why then, when the civil war in Northern Ireland began, did it last for thirty years? Two factors give a possible explanation. 1970 saw a Conservative government returned to power in Westminster, which reversed the previous Labour government’s policy of reform and attempted to deal with the situation strictly on a law and order basis. This policy merely exacerbated the conflict.

The second factor concerned the position in Dublin, where a very serious crisis threatened the stability of the state – a covert attempt by one or more senior government Ministers to supply arms to the Catholic nationalists in Northern Ireland, for use in a ‘doomsday’ situation. This led to the Arms Trials and as a result, Dublin recoiled from involvement in the gathering storm in the North. Garret FitzGerald was one of the chief architects of keeping the Southern state out of the conflict.

In the context of the thirty years of conflict, the important landmarks are:

1. The use by the British government of internment without trial.
2. The shooting dead of fourteen unarmed civilians by the British army in Derry in 1972, which marked the end of the civil rights campaign and the primacy of armed conflict in its place.
3. The attempt by the British government to ‘criminalize’ the conflict, which led to ten prisoners fasting to death in 1981.
4. The signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 by Prime Ministers

Garret Fitzgerald and Margaret Thatcher, with the aim of halting the rise of Sinn Féin, which it conspicuously failed to do. However, the Agreement did place Dublin as a partner with London in plotting the way forward in Northern Ireland. This greater equality of status had earlier been enhanced by the entry of the U.K. and Ireland into the EEC in 1973.

5. The disastrous consequences of the Remembrance Day bomb in Enniskillen in 1987, which was a watershed in the armed conflict and intensified the then secret search for a peace process.
6. The involvement of the U.S.A. in Northern Ireland. This began significantly when President Ronald Reagan urged Margaret Thatcher to conclude the Anglo-Irish Agreement, against all her natural instincts. However, the involvement of President Bill Clinton from 1994 was more significant. His important decisions were:
 - Granting a visa to Gerry Adams to enter the U.S.A. against the strong opposition of the British government.
 - Moving the Irish question from the State Department to the National Security Council in the White House.
 - Appointing Jean Kennedy Smith as U.S. Ambassador to Dublin.
 - Appointing Senator George Mitchell as the U.S.A.'s Special Envoy to Northern Ireland.

All of this led directly to the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Belfast by all the political parties involved.

Looking at the history of the last thirty years or so in retrospect, it is clear that when the 1968 campaign for civil rights led by university students and young nationalists gathered momentum, both Dublin and London failed to see the omens. When the storm broke, both governments were totally unprepared. The consequence of that un-preparedness was more serious for London, as Westminster had jurisdiction over the Province.

Four years earlier, in 1964, a Labour government, under Harold Wilson, had come to power after thirteen years in opposition. It was a government beset with problems – the devaluation of sterling, the Rhodesia crisis, the debilitating struggle to enter the EEC, to name but a few. Paul Arthur, Professor of Politics at the University of Ulster, writes

'In all these circumstances, domestic and external, it was not surprising that initially Northern Ireland was regarded as a side-show, which Richard Crossman recorded in his diary 'From the point of view of the government, it has its advantages. It has deflected attention from our own deficiencies and the mess of the pound. We have now got into something we can hardly mismanage.' Mismanage they did. The British government was psychologically and politically ill equipped for the coming storm. One must remember the degree to which Northern Ireland was not a democracy but a 'paranocracy', in which, as Ken Heskin writes 'the basis of power was the successful appeal to paranoid fears in the Protestant electorate about the political, social, philosophical and military potential of their Catholic neighbours ... It was a relatively mild and insulated paranocracy, impervious to economic and social failure, impervious to logical and political rebuttal and fuelled simply by regular doses of paranoia at appropriate moments in the social and political calendar.' What led to the collapse of the old order was sustained attention from outside.'

The closing thirty-two years of the twentieth century witnessed dramatic developments in the long, complex and often tragic relationship between the people of the two islands off the north-west coast of Europe. Many other players besides those living on these islands were progressively drawn in to the drama, including those from the continents of Europe, Africa and the United States of America. In future years, historians will sift and analyse the details of these events, while novelists and dramatists will attempt to create their masterpieces from what was undoubtedly a watershed in history.

‘WHERE I SENSED THE BREATH OF GOD’

WHAT FOLLOWS in this narrative is an account of the real-life stories of many ordinary people who played a significant part in the fateful years just described. The events and the people whose stories are told represent what can be seen as a minor thread in the complex tapestry of those tumultuous decades.

Bill and Muriel Porter

In the early 1960s, William Arthur Porter and his wife Muriel were living and working in Italy. It was a country Bill loved. He was a classics scholar, as his father was before him. He was, however, affected by a speech stammer, which over time he managed to master and he was able to teach classics for five years in the Royal School, Armagh. He was an Anglican and a devoted member of the Church of Ireland. While a student in Trinity College, Dublin, he was attracted to a fellow student, Muriel Barrett, who later became his wife.

Bill is one of the kindest of men but like so many of his community, he had an inherent assumption of superiority towards his fellow Catholic countrymen, a superiority which is effortless, unconscious and all-pervading in the Protestant community. While in Trinity, Bill encountered the religious movement, The Oxford Group, and it was as a result of a deep religious experience that he became aware of this malign defect in attitude, a defect from which so few recover.

P.J. Little

In the mid 1960s, Bill and Muriel returned to Dublin, where, as they had done in Italy, they gave their time to the work of Moral Re-Armament, the programme of Christian renewal that had evolved from The Oxford Group.

One of Bill's close friends in Dublin was P.J. Little. Paddy, as he was affectionately known, was a close friend and colleague of Eamon de Valera from the founding of the independent Irish State and had served as a Minister in de Valera's government. On a visit to Switzerland with Bill, Paddy met the American, Dr. Frank Buchman, the initiator of Moral Re-

Armament and on that visit Paddy was attracted to the writings of a Swiss theologian, Dr. Bernardus Kaelin, a former Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Order who was a supporter of Dr. Buchman's work.

Paddy decided to send Dr. Kaelin's writings to his Archbishop in Dublin, at that time Dr. John Charles McQuaid. However, Dr. McQuaid took strong objection to the documents and wrote to Paddy Little to tell him so. He concluded his hand-written letter to Paddy with the words "I must ask you to desist from all attempts to promote Moral Re-Armament in my diocese." In Ireland, Moral Re-Armament was, and still is, generally considered as an essentially Protestant religious organisation.

As a consequence of this rebuff, Paddy suggested to Bill that perhaps the key to Ireland lay in the North. He could not have realised then that Northern Ireland was a primed powder keg about to explode with such devastating effect in both Ireland and England.

Winifred Hind

Taking their friend's advice, Bill and Muriel moved to Belfast, where they made their home with an elderly widow, Dr. Winifred Hind, who lived in a large house off the Malone Road. It was a house so situated that people from both communities could visit safely. Dr. Hind was one of the first women to train as a medical doctor early in the twentieth century, and she served as a medical missionary in China for twenty years, where she married an Anglican Bishop, John Hind.

Winifred was a formidable character, who in her retirement devoted her considerable energies to charitable and church work. In certain ecclesiastical circles, she was known as 'the spiritual tank' as a result of her reputation for brooking no opposition! While she may indeed have been somewhat autocratic, she was a woman of great humanity and largeness of heart, with a lively concern and interest in other people and in events in the world around her. She had a deep longing that her home might be used to heal the wounds of a suffering Province.

Unlike Dublin, there existed in Belfast and Northern Ireland people from all strata of society who would count themselves as colleagues of Bill and Muriel Porter. The reason for this goes back to certain events some thirty years earlier.

Gordon Hannon

In the early 1930s, the Reverend Gordon Hannon was Church of Ireland rector of the Shankill parish in Lurgan, Co. Armagh, one of the largest parishes in Ireland, with more than 6,000 families; he was also Archdeacon of Dromore. At one point, he was invited by the Dean of Manchester to attend a conference entitled 'A School of Life for Clergy' run by The Oxford Group. At this conference, Gordon Hannon spoke of his concern for the state of affairs in Ireland. A friend suggested to him that if he wanted to change things in his country, he might consider starting with himself, by applying Christ's standards from the Sermon of the Mount, absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. He accepted this challenge and his change was soon apparent, both in his parish and with his wife and family.

In 1939 Archdeacon Hannon felt that he should free himself from his parish responsibilities in order to take on the wider needs of the nation. He consulted Dr. John Gregg, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. He asked the Primate if it would be worthwhile to attempt to enlist half a dozen of Ireland's leaders to give their lives to God for the sake of their country. Dr. Gregg is reported to have banged the table with his fist, saying "It would be worthwhile if only one or two did such a thing." He then gave the Archdeacon his blessing for the venture, although he regretted that the Church would be unable to support him financially.

Stepping out in faith, along with his wife Hilda and six children, Gordon Hannon's initiative was blessed by the generosity of many. A mill owner offered him a large house on the outskirts of Belfast for a rent of £100 a year and free electricity from the mill. From this base, he reached out to the political and civic leaders in both parts of Ireland, and a great variety of people rallied to his leadership and initiative.

Lord Hugh Beresford

One of these was Lord Hugh Beresford, a prominent member of the Anglo-Irish community, for whom Gordon Hannon arranged a visit to Eamon de Valera in Dublin and Gordon accompanied his friend at that meeting. More than 40 years later, *The Irish Times* in March 1984, carried the following report

Father Michael MacGriell S.J. revealed that President de Valera told him of an Anglo-Irish peer who asked to meet him around the

beginning of the Second World War. His visitor told the President that he regretted very much the hostility between the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and those who set up the new Irish State and their passivity in relation to public life. He promised that after the war, he would offer his services to building up the Irish State. The impact of this noble gesture so impressed de Valera that he felt he, for his part, would welcome such support. Unfortunately, the peer was killed in action but his offer had a lasting effect on de Valera.'

Lord Beresford died while serving with Lord Mountbatten on H.M.S Kelly when the destroyer was sunk by enemy action in 1942.

'The Forgotten Factor'

In 1946 Dr. Frank Buchman came from America to a war-torn Europe with a large team and an industrial play 'The Forgotten Factor'. The campaign began in Belfast, where the ground had been thoroughly prepared by Gordon Hannon and his team. The visit of the play and the international group was a great success, with the theatre packed to capacity for three weeks and the foundations were laid for much of the subsequent work in the years to come.

His daughter Ruth, who loved and respected her father, felt that she too, should attempt to build bridges in a divided community. Unusually for someone from a unionist Protestant background, she has spent many years attempting to master the Gaelic language.

In January 1978, Gordon Hannon died, aged 87. *The County Down Spectator*, in the course of an appreciation of his life and work, wrote *'In 1949, when the Congress of Europe was launched at The Hague, Eamon de Valera asked Archdeacon Hannon to go to the Congress ... and speak for the North. The Archdeacon took with him Mr. Fred Thompson, a Unionist M.P. in Belfast, and the following year they both attended the Council of Europe at Strasbourg.'*

Of the many people attracted by the commitment and endeavours of Gordon Hannon, there are three men who should be mentioned at this point in the story, as they each in their own particular way played a decisive role in the growing conflict in Northern Ireland.

Brian Hewitt

The first is Brian Montgomery Hewitt, who was born and grew up in Portadown, Co. Armagh, a town renowned as the ‘true heart’ of Ulster and the Orange Order. His father was a life-long Orangeman. In his youth, Brian contracted osteomyelitis, in the days before the advent of penicillin and as a result, he had a shortened and deformed leg. To aid Brian’s recovery and improve the use of his disabled leg, his father encouraged his young son to play golf and later in life he became a low handicap golfer of considerable skill. He often recalled what he felt was the highlight of his golfing career, a round in a pro-am tournament partnering the famous South African professional, Gary Player.

Qualifying as an architect, Brian joined a small Belfast firm of consulting architects. In the course of time, he was invited by Anthony Lucy to join him as a partner in this firm. It was his meeting and association with Gordon Hannon and Moral Re-Armament that gave Brian a deep consciousness of the attitudes and behaviour of his Protestant community, which had warped the relationship with its Catholic nationalist neighbours.

Dennis Haslem

As the workload of the firm increased, it became evident that another architect was needed. Brian interviewed a number of applicants before picking a man whom he considered to be the most competent and suitable for the post. The successful applicant, Dennis Haslem, had been in the employment of Belfast City Council and one day, his boss in the City’s architectural department had called him in and told him “Dennis, you are an excellent architect, but I am sorry to have to tell you, and you yourself will understand this, you cannot hope to advance here.” The reason was that Dennis was a Catholic and senior positions in City Hall never went to Catholics.

Faced with this situation, Dennis decided to try to find work in the private sector in Northern Ireland. He applied for a position with a large, well-established firm in Belfast. The interview went well and it appeared that the firm was considering engaging Dennis. Then he was asked one final question, unrelated to his architectural qualifications, “Which school did you go to?” a device commonly used in Northern Ireland to establish to which

community a person belongs. However, the question so offended Dennis he immediately replied “If that’s the way of things here, I am not interested” and without further ado, he picked up his hat and coat and walked straight out of the building.

Dennis decided to give the private sector one more chance, before emigrating to Australia and it was at this point that he was invited by Brian Hewitt to join his architects firm. Dennis was an exceptionally gifted architect and when Anthony Lucy retired, Brian invited Dennis to become a partner. Brian’s family in Portadown strongly protested. When they found that they could not change Brian’s mind, they urged him that he should on no account form a partnership with Dennis on a 50/50 basis, but again, Brian refused to relent.

Re-building bombed Belfast

Over the following years, Brian Hewitt and Dennis Haslem became highly regarded in their profession. They both at various times during the 1970s held the post of General Secretary of the Royal Society of Ulster Architects and Dennis also became President of the Society. Working together, they designed some of Belfast’s most notable new buildings. In the 1980s, Dennis was appointed advisor to the Government Minister, Richard Needham, on the re-building of bomb destroyed Belfast and because of his expertise, he was appointed Chairman of the agency responsible for the preservation and restoration of many of Belfast’s and the Province’s historic buildings.

George Dallas

Another personality whose story should be told was medical specialist, Dr. George Gordon Dallas. George specialised in diseases of the chest and in that capacity, served in hospitals throughout Northern Ireland. George’s abiding love was his Presbyterian community. He leaned towards its more radical tradition, admiring the United Irishman, Dr. William Drennan, and the renowned Glasgow teacher and philosopher, Rev. Francis Hutcheson, who was born in Co. Armagh and had influence on both sides of the Atlantic. Another influence was Francis Mackemie, from Ramelton, Co. Donegal, the father of the Presbyterian Church in North America, and in later years, George was much influenced by the life of Rev. J.B. Armour of Ballymoney

and the writings of his son, W.S. Armour, editor of *The Northern Whig* newspaper.

Clonard Monastery

When the conflict in Northern Ireland was at its height, George, with his Swiss wife Ruth, attended a weekly Bible study at Clonard Monastery, which is in the heart of Catholic West Belfast. It was there, in an encounter with a Catholic member of this study group, that George had a profound experience that changed his whole attitude to the other community in the Province. The conversation with this man caused George to break down and weep bitter tears. In writing about it later, George wrote

For me, the most devastating experience was when one of our new friends told me how his life was made hell every day at work by a bullyboy, who also intimidated his Protestant fellow workers. Ironically, our friend was not seeking sympathy or even understanding but was deploring his own lack of Christian forgiveness for his persecutor. A dozen such bullyboys can terrorise a large factory and make it impossible for Catholics to work there. I realised as never before the injustice of our dominance, which at all levels depends ultimately on the threat of sectarian murder. About the same time, having begun to understand about what we needed to repent for, and a little about repentance itself, I began to think of what repentance must mean for our community in relation to Ireland. Surely, it must mean a humble and glad acceptance of ourselves fully as Irish people, as we were always meant to be, not Irish and British as well, or any other formula that allows us to go on feeling superior. Unless our community finds this kind of repentance and learns to care for all the people of Ireland, there will always be violence in this country.'

There is a fuller account of the life of George Dallas in a short biography entitled 'The Second Conversion of Dr. George Dallas' by Dr. Roddy Evans.

The Trade Unionists

As the civil conflict intensified in the early 1970s, an evening meeting was arranged in the Queen's Hall, in downtown Belfast. It was an occasion for

two visiting English trade unionists to address an invited audience. One of these men was a militant dockers leader from the Port of Avonmouth and the other was a building worker from Coventry, who had been a communist and had survived as a Japanese prisoner of war in the construction of the Burma railway. He spoke about how he had lost his hatred of the Japanese and Japan. Tommy Elwood, standing at the back of the hall, was deeply affected by this story.

Tommy was deputy convenor of the trade union in a Belfast engineering firm, the Davidson Sirocco Works. This company had been a world leader in the manufacture of ventilating fans and tea drying machinery. In the disturbances in the 1920s, all Catholic workers had been driven out of the factory. From that time, the firm had a reputation of employing only Protestants. That night, Tommy, an Orangemen, lost his deep hatred of Catholics.

From this beginning, Tommy formed some unlikely friendships. One was with a City councillor, Jack Lavelle, a Catholic from West Belfast who was a member of the Republican Labour Party. Tommy also repaired his relationship with the Convenor of his own trade union, Jimmy McIlwaine. Others became interested, including Billy Childs, an Orangeman and a member of the Black Preceptory, and Billy Arnold, Secretary of the Boilermakers' Society. These men and their wives formed a cross community group made up of trade union members.

George Dallas had a gift of recalling the idiomatic conversations of Belfast people. Using this gift, he put together a short play illustrating how hardened sectarian attitudes could change, even in the most die-hard people. George was helped in the scripting of his play by a very able and astute Catholic trade unionist from West Belfast, Gerry O'Neill. Tommy, Jimmy, their wives and others did readings of the play to invited audiences, as bombs exploded and conflict raged on the streets of Belfast.

North America

This small experiment in healing sectarian hatreds attracted the attention of a Canadian, Dr. Paul Campbell, who was then living in London. He was concerned about the situation in Canada at that time, where nationalists had turned to violence. The British Trade Commissioner in Canada, Jasper Cross,

had been taken hostage. Thankfully, he was released alive after 45 days in captivity, but the Quebec Minister of Labour, Pierre Laporte, was less fortunate: he was also taken hostage and later found dead in the boot of a car.

Paul Campbell came to Belfast to meet the men. He suggested to them that they could advance their own situation in Northern Ireland as they helped with the situation in Canada. “Why not come to Canada with your play?” he asked. So began the first of what turned out to be many visits across the Atlantic. In Canada, they travelled to Montreal, Trois Rivières, Quebec City, Ottawa and the far West, Alberta and British Columbia. In the United States, they visited New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Virginia, West Virginia and Washington, DC.

The State Department

At a meeting in the State Department in Washington, attended by the heads of the Irish, British and other European desks, officials were keen to meet people from the grass roots in Northern Ireland – folk they regarded as the ‘nuts and bolts’ of the problem. At this meeting, Jack Lavelle took the opportunity to vent Catholic anger at the events of ‘Bloody Sunday’ in the City of Derry, when paratroopers had opened fire on an unarmed civil rights march, killing 14 people and wounding many others. His Protestant colleagues at the meeting became more and more incensed as Jack hogged the occasion. Billy Childs, especially, was furious and decided there and then to take the next flight home. After the meeting, the party went for what was only a short walk from the State Department to the Lincoln Memorial. There, as he read the Gettysburg Address, Billy Childs found that his anger and hatred of Jack Lavelle had melted away.

On these visits to the United States, their generous host was Mitchell Bingham, son of Senator Hiram Bingham, explorer and discoverer of Machu Picchu, the hidden fortress of the Peruvian Incas.

Laurent Gagnon and Billy Arnold

North America was responsible for an unexpected turn of events in Northern Ireland. In the mid-1970s, a young French Canadian from Quebec, Laurent Gagnon, arrived in Belfast, to see for himself what was going on. Friends in Belfast made arrangements for him to stay in the home of Billy Arnold and his wife Ivy. Billy was a boilermaker who had worked for many years in the

Harland & Wolf shipyard. As well as being secretary of his union, he later became Chairman of the Boilermakers' Society for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

At the time Laurent Gagnon came to his house as a guest, Billy was on leave from the yard – a steel plate had fallen on his foot, an injury requiring medical treatment. Billy was a member of the Orange Order and as such, had little contact with the Catholic nationalist community. In 1920 at the height of the disturbances that ushered in the partition of Ireland, Protestant workers had driven Catholic workers out of the shipyards and the workforce in the shipyards had remained almost entirely Protestant from that time.

Father Christy McCarthy

How was Billy to entertain a young French Catholic, a visitor to his house? He hit on the notion that the best thing to do would be to take the young man to visit the local Catholic priests. On the third such visit, Billy called on the Redemptorist Clonard Monastery, which was not far from Billy's home but in the heart of Catholic West Belfast.

There they met an unusual priest, Father Christopher McCarthy C.Ss.R., who had recently returned from a theological teaching post in Villa Nova University, Philadelphia. Before that he had served in India, Ceylon and Australia and before that again had been a much-loved Director of a large confraternity at Clonard Monastery. A fellow priest once described Father McCarthy thus "Some priests are pastors and some priests are explorers but Father Christy is the arch-explorer!" Father Christy loved people with an abiding interest in everything about them, who they were and what they did. He was orthodox in his faith and at heart an Irish patriot.

The young French Canadian visitor invited Father Christy to the home of Winifred Hind, who was entertaining friends one evening. He decided to accept the invitation and went along to the meeting. However, he was not overly impressed with the people he met there and decided that one visit to this house would be enough. That was until an old lady spoke to him.

Ellie McDermott

Her name was Mrs. Ellie McDermott and she was a widow. Her late husband had been a bank official and her father, Sir Frederick Simmons, was the war time Mayor of Derry City, and of course, a staunch unionist. This

city represented the most notorious case in the Province of unfair elections for the city council, where the practice of gerrymandering was endemic. The majority of the population in Derry City were Catholic and yet the minority Protestant unionist community contrived to control the city council. That evening, Ellie McDermott apologised to Father McCarthy for the way she and her family had behaved in Derry towards his people. Later Father McCarthy said “The sincerity of that apology from that old lady struck me like a blow in the chest. It was the first time I had heard someone from her class admit to the wrongs that had been done by her people.”

Paddy Lynn

The next important development concerns a Belfast man, Paddy Lynn. Paddy was born and lived close to Clonard Monastery. He was employed by the gas department of Belfast City Council. One afternoon in the early days of the conflict, following a meeting with his brother Michael, who had been seriously wounded by an unknown gunman, Paddy found himself deeply burdened and hopeless, not only for himself but about the whole situation. As he threaded his way homewards through the streets of Andersonstown, he decided to sit down on a street wall for a rest, where he continued to nurse his desolation.

All of a sudden, the army and an IRA unit opened fire on each other, with bullets flying in all directions. A woman opened her street door to urge Paddy to seek shelter in the safety of her home. But Paddy continued to sit there in his misery.

Later, as he made for home, he passed the open door of Saint Oliver Plunkett’s Church, so he decided to go in for another rest. As he sat in the silence of the church, he felt a Presence envelop him and heard a voice distinctly saying ‘Paddy, I have work for you.’ Paddy walked out into the night a different man.

Clonard Bible studies

Describing this experience later, Paddy said “It was like walking on a beach beside the sea on a sunny day. Then a soft summer breeze touched me and passed on.” Some weeks later, Paddy attended a function held in the parish hall attached to Clonard Monastery. Pushing his way through the crowd, Father McCarthy sought out Paddy, completely unaware of what had happened to him. As he greeted Paddy, Father Christy asked “What should

we do in this present situation in Belfast?” Paddy replied “You should begin a Bible Study group.” Father Christy immediately answered “We will have our first one next Thursday evening here in Clonard.” So began those Thursday evening meetings under the guidance of Father McCarthy.

A little later, Father Christy asked Paddy to come and see him. When Paddy arrived, Father Christy said to him “I have a friend upstairs and I would like you to go and meet him. Please tell him all about your experience.” Father Christy’s friend was Father Aidan Cusack, OCSO, a Cistercian monk and priest.

Afterwards, Father Cusack came down to meet Father Christy and said “I agree: what Paddy Lynn has told me of what happened to him is a true experience of the Holy Spirit.”

Father McCarthy’s vocation

At about this time, the Rector of a Redemptorist Monastery sensed that Father Christy McCarthy had a vocation to try to reach out to the divided Protestant community in Northern Ireland ‘to remove the myths and misunderstandings from the minds of some of those from that community.’ Father Christy knew this was right but was initially reluctant to undertake such a difficult task. However, after the encouragement of the meeting with the old lady from Derry at the house off the Malone Road in Belfast, he decided to invite some of the Protestants he had met there to join his Bible Study group. These meetings, every Thursday evening, studying the Bible together, turned out to be the unusual means of stripping off the polite veneer that members of each community presented to each other. The reality of underlying prejudice and hate was exposed, in all its ugliness but this exposure was done in a context of understanding and healing.

Father McCarthy next arranged for members of the group in George Dallas’s short play to give readings to selected audiences in different parts of Ireland, including Dublin, Wexford and Derry. They also paid visits to the Irish parliament and the President of Ireland in the early 1980s.

Limerick

On one such visit, the party were the guests of the Redemptorist Monastery in Limerick, where they were received by both the Protestant and Catholic Bishops and the Mayor had a reception for them to meet other civic leaders.

As Mrs. Ellie McDermott was being driven down by car to this occasion from Belfast, she became acquainted with some of the history of Limerick for the first time. For example, she discovered that Limerick had a siege similar to Derry. The first meeting of the group in the city happened to be an informal gathering around the fire in the parlour of Hanratty's Hotel, with the Irish Minister of Justice, a Limerick man. In a break in the conversation, Ellie suddenly remarked "Mr O'Malley, I have learned that Limerick had a siege at the same time as Derry, but in Limerick, it was the other way round, the wrong people were on the inside."!

For the period of her stay, Ellie McDermott was the guest of a convent, the first time she had ever been in such an institution. Her concept of life for nuns in such a place had been a number of small bare cells for its devotees. Instead she found herself in a well-furnished, cosy bedroom with her breakfast served to her in bed each morning. On the drive back to Belfast, Ellie was rather thoughtful. At last she asked "How could those young women be so nice when their religion is all wrong?"!

In later years, Ellie McDermott visited The Holy Land with a group led by Father McCarthy and on another occasion travelled to Derry City, to meet Bishop Edward Daly, to speak to him about the way her father, as Mayor of the city, and their family, had behaved so arrogantly towards the Catholic people.

'Belfast Report'

At about this time, it was decided to make a documentary film to record the developing understanding and change of attitude that now existed between some individuals from the Protestant and Catholic communities. A BBC filmmaker, Hannen Foss and a colleague, Peter Sisam, agreed to undertake the venture. The resulting production was entitled 'Belfast Report'.

One Saturday morning in Clonard Monastery, Father McCarthy arranged a showing of the film for Gerry Adams and his uncle Liam Hannaway. At the close of the screening, Adams said "This is one of the best presentations of its kind that I have seen. However, it misses the point. The fundamental issue here is the relationship between the two nations, Ireland and England. Sectarian division in the province is a secondary issue." Nobody present at the occasion could fault that observation.

England and the English

Unexpectedly, a timely opening towards England and the English suddenly developed. The Rev. Desmond Parsons, the rector of All Saints Church, Dulwich, London, was conducting a weekly discussion group with men in his parish, which included Jake Ecclestone who headed the journalist's chapel at *The Times*. At one of the meetings, Mr Ecclestone raised the matter of the continuing civil strife in Northern Ireland. He asked "We have discussed many topics at these meetings but so far we have said nothing about what is happening in a part of the U.K. Does anyone in this group have contacts in Northern Ireland and would they invite some people from there to come and speak to us?"

Leslie Fox

One of those present, Mr. Leslie Fox, replied that he did have some contacts and that he would make enquiries to see if someone from there would come to meet them. Desmond Parsons himself also had a connection with Ireland, in that he was a cousin of the Earl of Rosse who lived in a castle in Co. Offaly.

The request from All Saints Church was answered by Father McCarthy bringing a group of Protestants and Catholics to London. They were guests of the parishioners in the church and met with them in the home of Tom and Ida Garrud. Tom was a lay reader and active church member and a director of *The Daily Mail* newspaper. From this beginning a working link grew between All Saints Church, Dulwich and Clonard Monastery, with several visits and exchanges.

Rev. John Austin Baker

At this time, the Reverend John Austin Baker was Rector of St. Margaret's Church, Westminster and a Canon at the nearby Westminster Abbey. He was also the Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons. In response to the Pope's visit to Ireland, Canon Baker felt he should make a statement from the pulpit, in which he expressed his sense of shame at what his country England had done to Ireland over the centuries. Contrary to his usual habit, he decided to issue his sermon to the press and newspapers in Ireland carried it widely.

As a result of hearing about this, Father McCarthy decided to visit London to call on Canon Baker. Thus, in this most unexpected way, there was established a strong link between the Church of England and churches in Belfast and elsewhere in the Province. This confirmed a conviction expressed by a member of Father McCarthy's study group that "the true heart of England resides in the Church of England, the aristocracy and the army. That heart is still sound and with a renewed heart, could halt the decline of a great nation."

Week of prayers for Christian unity

In January every year throughout the Christian world, a week is set aside for prayers for Christian unity. Father McCarthy arranged special services in Clonard Monastery church and invited Canon Baker to preach there. Later, when Canon Baker was appointed as Bishop of Salisbury, he became the first Anglican Bishop to preach in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, at the invitation of the Catholic Primate, Cardinal Tomas O Fiaich. Bishop Baker took the opportunity to meet with political and church leaders from both communities during the course of a number of visits to the Province.

In the following years, Clonard Monastery invited the Rev. Desmond Parsons, of All Saints, Dulwich and Canon A.M. Allchin, of Canterbury Cathedral, to preach in the Monastery church during the week of prayers for Christian unity.

The Anglo-Irish Ascendancy

From time to time, Father McCarthy's Church of Ireland friends would express their views on the history of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy to him privately and sometimes openly to the Bible group. Perhaps as a test to see if they really meant what they said, Father McCarthy decided to challenge them to go public with their views. Four of these friends had spent some months previously conferring with a Presbyterian colleague and they had learned from him, for the first time, of the deeply felt discrimination that the Presbyterian community had endured over many years under the Ascendancy.

As it happened, the Church of Ireland's 'Role of the Church Committee' had just issued a statement which concluded with the words 'Given penitence, honesty, realism and a determination to face radical change, there

is still time for Churches, Governments and others to make a positive contribution to the creation of a society for which we all long.’ Accepting Father McCarthy’s challenge and the opportunity created by their church’s statement, the four friends composed a brief account of the history of the Anglican community in Ireland. This, in part, is what they wrote

‘The Protestant Ascendancy that ruled the Dublin Parliament (prior to 1800) was the Ascendancy of the Church of Ireland. So the Penal Laws were to some extent applied to Presbyterians also. They, like Catholics, could not hold office under the Crown. They, like Catholics, were forced to pay tithes to help finance the Church of Ireland.

But what we, as members of the Ascendancy Church, did to the Catholics, was infamous beyond belief. As the Chief Justice of the day said ‘The law does not suppose any such person to exist as an Irish Roman Catholic.’

By our studied and deliberate degradation of a proud and cultured people, we reduced them to a poverty stricken peasantry bereft of their natural leaders. We hounded their priests and denied them all possibility of education.

We are deeply sorry for these and many other such deeds, not in the spirit of breast-beating, but in honesty and penitence. We know that we must realistically face them if we are ever to be trusted in the future. We know of many other situations in the world where an honest and penitent facing of the facts, instead of excusing ourselves, could lead to ‘the creation of a society for which we all long.’

(See Appendix 3 for the full text of this statement)

This was signed by Bill and Muriel Porter, Eric Turpin and the author of this Memoir, all of whom were born in the South of Ireland, were graduates of Trinity College Dublin and had lived for a number of years in Northern Ireland.

The Bishop

Before publishing the statement, they decided to show it to their Bishop, Dr. George Quinn, and spent a morning with him. His reaction was that they

should on no account issue the statement, since he felt it would only make matters worse and added “We must not look at the past. We are all to blame for this situation, we must all repent.” At the end of the meeting, he prayed, closing his prayer with “We are not responsible for the sins of our fathers.”

The Archbishop’s wife

Despite this lack of support, the four friends arranged to call on the then Primate of the Church of Ireland, Archbishop Dr. George Otto Simms. They discovered that Bishop Quinn had already notified Dr. Simms that he was going to be consulted about a ‘rather seditious’ document. Having read it, Dr. Simms passed it to his wife, an academic history scholar.

As soon as she had read it, she commented vigorously “This should have been issued years ago, and it should have been done officially.” She then asked rhetorically “Why is it necessary? Because our attitudes are the same, they have not changed and we would do the same all over again.” She urged the signatories to be sure to issue it so that it would appear in the press on the opening day of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland, to be held in Dublin a short time later.

At around that time, Moral Re-Armament was holding a conference on the Commonwealth in London and the four Church of Ireland friends used this occasion to issue their statement publicly. As Mrs. Simms had correctly judged, the Irish press and radio were swift to pick up its significance and the statement appeared prominently on the page of *The Irish Times* allocated for news of the General Synod in Dublin.

Joan Tapsfield

A senior English civil servant, Miss Joan Tapsfield, was living in retirement in Kent and was concerned about the position of civil servants working in Northern Ireland. She felt it her duty to find out how they were faring, so she wrote to a friend in Derry, Miss Kathleen Montgomery, to ask if she might come to visit her to see for herself what was happening. Miss Montgomery gladly welcomed Joan Tapsfield to her home.

The upshot was that eventually Joan sold her home in Kent and lived 18 years in Northern Ireland, first in Derry and then in Belfast. An experience during her first days in Northern Ireland changed her life, of which she wrote

'My second visit to Derry coincided with their Civic Week, which included an exhibition in the University called 'Emigration'. Derry and the ports of Inishowen had seen many of the farewells of people who left Ireland in thousands in the mid-nineteenth century. The exhibition included letters home from some of them and newspaper adverts from shipping companies, some of whom would provide a few loaves for the four to five week journey. Many passengers, already exhausted by famine, died en route and the ships became known as 'coffin ships'.

I had been reading a history of Inishowen and the exhibition confirmed my impression that England, at that time responsible for the government of the whole of Ireland, was being blamed for all these tragedies. I strenuously resisted this idea, attributing it to 'left-wing propaganda'. All the same I was troubled about it.

Driving around Inishowen on a lovely summer day, we visited a little Catholic church where there were very vivid pictures of the Stations of the Cross. The one that caught my eye was the one where Pilate was washing his hands to disclaim responsibility for the death of Jesus. It struck me like lightning that Pilate was a typical official, not deliberately wicked but sacrificing truth to expediency; typical, too, of officialdom in our own time, and of my resistance to accepting the truth of the damage my country had done to Ireland.

I knelt and prayed for forgiveness for myself and my country and for courage to do whatever God wanted. After a few more visits and consulting my Irish friends, I decided to sell my home in Kent and move to Northern Ireland, as a drop in the ocean of the restitution we owed to the Irish of whom so many had been forced to leave their homes.

I have grown to love Ireland, but the mainspring of my move was a love of England. If my father, for whom I had great affection and respect, had died in debt, I should have wanted to repay the debt. I feel the same way about my country. To face the past is not to forego our patriotism but to enhance it.'

From 'An English Pilgrim in Northern Ireland 1977-1992'

Australia

Whenever Joan Tapsfield visited Belfast, she appreciated being invited to join in the Clonard Bible studies and in 1979 she was asked to travel in a party with Father McCarthy to Australia, on a visit to the main cities. She records in her booklet how they visited the home of a left-wing socialist couple and writes

‘Our hosts started the evening with a vehement attack on the church. When they paused for breath, Father McCarthy spoke, ignoring the criticisms and telling gently humorous stories of his previous time in Australia. Their attack then switched to other grounds and, being allergic to fierce arguments, I was shrivelling back in my corner hoping not to be noticed when someone said ‘Why don’t you tell them why you came to live in Northern Ireland?’ Hesitantly I stammered out ‘Well, it began when I learned how much damage England had done in Ireland.’ Like a flash the lady turned to me and shot out ‘No one’s going to argue with that, and a lot of other countries, too.’ It was an interesting evening for all of us.’

It turned out that these remarks about Ireland were instrumental in triggering Australian concern about their constitutional crisis. This had arisen when the Governor General of Australia, who represented the Queen, had dismissed the government in what was seen by many Australians as a high-handed manner. It was an incident that aroused much anti-English feeling in Australia and Joan Tapsfield writes

‘In some obscure way, this feeling was mitigated by an English person being sorry about Ireland. I don’t understand it but it happened!’

Kathleen Montgomery

The lady who first welcomed Joan Tapsfield to Derry was herself another remarkable woman. For many years, Miss Kathleen (‘Kitty’) Montgomery had nursed her aged mother in Belfast. When her mother died, Kitty decided to move to Derry and make her home there. This move was prompted by the memory of her late father, who had felt deeply that Belfast had neglected the needs of Derry, the second city of the Province. However,

Kitty's decision was strongly opposed by her immediate family living in Belfast. Nevertheless, she resided in Derry for the next thirty years and on her death, *The Derry Journal* carried the headline

'A Tribute to a Great Lady'. Sister Aloysius McVeigh, R.S.M., wrote the article, which reads in part

Kathleen, or Kitty, was one of those beautiful paradoxes God seems to delight in. She never preached a sermon, yet her life was a testimony to God's word, alive and active in her. She never taught a class or lectured an audience, yet all who knew her learned lessons of grace, gentleness and generosity. She never looked for publicity or popularity, yet after only a few years in Derry, she knew more people and was loved better than any of us who had spent a lifetime there. Kitty came to Derry as God's ambassador of Peace – she would never have thought of herself in that title but it is true. Though Kitty was always loyal to her Presbyterian heritage and upbringing and never missed a service in her First Presbyterian Church while she could still walk – and even after, when she could not walk, a Catholic nun (Sister Aloysius ed.) drove her there every Sunday till she was over ninety, yet she was always genuinely happy to share with other denominations any special services of prayer or celebration.'

The Peace Process

Anne Cadwallader, feature writer for *Ireland on Sunday* had an article headlined 'Cradle of the Peace Process' on 12th December 1999, and sub-headed 'On a place which played a vital role in the North's long and winding road to democracy'. Her article reads in part

Although the public pageantry of the peace process has taken place against the splendour of Stormont, its birthplace and cradle was Clonard Monastery in West Belfast, now celebrating a century's work in the midst of the troubles. Clonard, whose high altar is just one hundred yards from the Falls/Shankill peace line and whose walls bear silent witness to the pogroms of the 1920s and the burning of Bombay Street in 1969, has more than earned its place in the hearts of people across Ireland.

The Monastery, dedicated to the Most Holy Redeemer, was built in just three years, paid for from the public subscriptions of the poverty-stricken mill workers who lived around it in the early years of the century. So it was perhaps fitting that its walls witnessed the first meetings between Gerry Adams and John Hume, brought together by Father Alex Reid, one of the Redemptorist priests of the Monastery, to talk about building peace, as long ago as 1988. Another of its priests, Father Gerry Reynolds, is a pioneer of cross-community work and on 30th November this year received the PAX CHRISTI Award in Dublin, jointly with his friend, Presbyterian Minister, the Rev. Ken Newell.'

Anne Cadwallader concludes her article with the words of John Austin Baker, Anglican Bishop of Salisbury, written in 1983

'How wonderfully God draws us here to the Falls Road to learn more of what it means to be a Christian and to pledge ourselves, Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican, to live our Christianity together.'

Father Christy McCarthy: a Final Tribute

One of the parishioners of All Saints Church, Dulwich, Leslie Fox, wrote in *The Irish Times*, 18th November 1981

'I resisted for some time the idea that my country's past policies were in any way responsible for the trouble in Northern Ireland. Then two years ago when I was present at Clonard Monastery in the Falls area of Belfast, where a group of Protestants and Catholics were studying the Bible together, I read in the Second Book of Peter, Chapter 3, 'He does not wish any to perish but all to betake them to repentance'. I had been studying the history of Ireland and those words riveted for me the thought that my country and I needed to repent and change.

Father McCarthy of Clonard Monastery has what he calls a "dazzling vision" of what England and Ireland working together could do for the rest of the world. What hope and fresh direction these two nations, united, could give to every hopeless situation in the world!'

When Father Christopher McCarthy died in 1983, his friend and colleague Father Alex Reid wrote this tribute in a Belfast morning paper

‘This was to be the last, and many would say, the most glorious, chapter in the story of his missionary enterprises: now he was braving the pain and the difficulties of a crippling illness and, at the same time, breaking new paths across the dangerous lines of prejudice and misunderstanding that so deeply divide the people of Northern Ireland.

The people of Moral Re-Armament were closely associated with him in this apostolate and their friendship was a token of strength and comfort during his final years. Together, they contacted people in England who were deeply concerned about the situation in Ireland. Among them was John Baker, Bishop of Salisbury, a man of great vision and integrity and with a deep Christian love for the people of Ireland. He became, at Father McCarthy’s request, the first Protestant pastor to preach in a Catholic church in Belfast.’

With the gift of hindsight, like a golden thread, the events that are recorded here, humanly unplanned, have followed one another in a remarkably ordered sequence. Father McCarthy would have unquestionably attributed this to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

APPENDICES

*An appreciation of the life and work of
Father Christopher McCarthy,
whose faithful vocation to reach out to the Protestant community
made the story of this Memoir possible, written by a fellow priest, which
appeared in the Belfast morning paper, 'The Irish News' on 16th August 1983.*

FATHER CHRISTOPHER McCARTHY C.Ss.R., Clonard Monastery, Belfast, who has died at the age of 72, will be sadly missed, especially in Belfast where his work for reconciliation and peace endeared him to many people, both Catholic and Protestant.

A native of Limerick city, where he was born in 1911, he was educated by the Cistercians at their college in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary. In 1929, when he was eighteen, he joined the Redemptorists at their noviciate in Dundalk and, a year later, took the vows of the religious life. He then went to the Redemptorist Seminary near Athenry in Co. Galway to study for the priesthood and to prepare himself for his life as a missionary.

Ordained in 1935 by the late Dr. Dignan of Clonfert, he began an apostolic career that was to last for nearly fifty years and to see him preaching the Gospel on missions and retreats throughout Ireland and then across the seas on Redemptorist foreign missions in India, Sri Lanka, Australia and the United States.

Always a keen student of the sacred sciences, he took a master's degree in theology at the American University of Loyola and then taught theology there for several years. He was Director of the Men's Holy Family Confraternity in Belfast from 1955 to 1961. More than twenty years has passed since then but he still stands out in the minds and hearts of the men as one of their great Directors. Indeed, the thought of the Confraternity or even of Clonard Church itself immediately evokes for many of them, the thought and the memory of Father McCarthy.

They still remember points he made in his sermons and how those sermons were always carefully prepared and powerfully inspired by his own great faith and trust in God. They recall, with deep feelings of gratitude, the compassion he always showed as a confessor, the comfort he so often gave

to the sick and the bereaved and his wise and encouraging counsel when someone was worried or in trouble. They like to acknowledge how much their own understanding and practice of the faith owe to his example and guidance.

He will be remembered with similar esteem and affection by the many people, Protestant and Catholic, who came to know him and to work with him when, again in Belfast, he inspired and directed a magnificent apostolate for Christian reconciliation and peace.

This was to be the last, and many would say, the most glorious chapter in the story of his missionary enterprises because now he was braving the pain and difficulties of a crippling illness and at the same time, breaking new paths across the dangerous lines of prejudice and misunderstanding that so divide the people of Northern Ireland.

Showing all the old drive and initiative and with a dauntless trust in God that enabled him to rise to heroic heights of courage and determination, he helped to organise new points of contact between Catholics and Protestants so that, by praying and studying regularly together, they might share their hopes and plans for peace.

The members of Moral Re-Armament were closely associated with him in this apostolate and their friendship was a tower of strength and comfort during his final years. Together they contacted people in England who were deeply concerned about the situation in Ireland. Among them was John Austin Baker, now Bishop of Salisbury and then Anglican Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons. A man of great vision and integrity and with a deep love for the people of Ireland, he became, at Father McCarthy's request, the first Protestant pastor to preach in a Catholic church in Belfast.

This was during Christian Unity Week, 1980, when he spoke to a packed Catholic and Protestant congregation at the Clonard Service for Christian Unity. This has now become an annual Service, a real celebration of the Irish quest for Christian Unity where, every year, Catholic priests and Protestant ministers, people from the Falls and people from the Shankill join hands and hearts to praise their common Lord and to reach out to each other in joyful fellowship.

At this year's Service, a Protestant elder from the Shankill Road carried the Bible up the aisle of Clonard church and then read it to the

congregation from the sanctuary. It was a simple but, in the circumstances, a deeply significant ceremony that caught the spirit and the promise of this annual celebration.

The truly Christian joy which so many Protestants and Catholics have experienced in worshipping together at the Clonard Service and the deep Christian hope for the future which this has inspired in their hearts, are living signs of the Holy Spirit, a beautiful pledge that He is always with them, when they come together to pray and to work for reconciliation and peace. They are signs too of God's approval and God's blessing on the work of the man who inspired it all – Father McCarthy.

Now that he has gone from us, those who knew him best will always remember the unique charm of his personality and that gentle humanity which was so characteristic and which made him so approachable. They will remember most of all the truly heroic courage and even cheerfulness that he constantly displayed in the face of a long martyrdom of illness, and that could only have been the fruit of a faith that was very deep and very strong and kept him constantly close to Our Lord in child-like trust.

He once said to a friend, "You have a simple faith and that's the best faith of all". The story of his life as a priest and as a missionary bears eloquent testimony to the simplicity and the humility of his own child-like faith. That was his secret and, for us, the pledge that in the land where there is no sickness and where 'every tear will be wiped away' (Rev. 7, 17) he is now enjoying the blessedness promised to the peace-makers and to those who, in their attitude to God, 'become like little children' (Matt.18, 3).

A.R. August 1983

*A statement made by
four Trinity College Dublin graduates,
published by The Irish Times and other newspapers in May 1977.*

‘The Role of the Church Committee’ of the Church of Ireland issued an important statement in February 1977. It ends with the words ‘Given penitence, honesty, realism and a determination to face radical change, there is still time for the Churches, Governments and others to make a positive contribution to the creation of a society for which we all long.’

In 1691, William of Orange concluded the war in Ireland with the Treaty of Limerick. He granted terms that were generous for the age. They included giving Catholics the same rights they had under Charles II and also permitted the defeated Irish to hold lands under certain conditions.

In 1692 the Parliament that met in Dublin refused to ratify the Treaty. In 1695 they set up Penal Laws with the aim of removing land and power from Catholics.

The Protestant Ascendancy that ruled the Dublin Parliament was the Ascendancy of the Church of Ireland. So the Penal Laws were to some extent applied to Presbyterians also. They, like Catholics, could not hold office under the Crown. They, like Catholics, were forced to pay tithes to help finance the Church of Ireland.

For these and other reasons Presbyterians migrated in tens of thousands to the United States. In the War of Independence they, through their sense of grievance, helped form the backbone of Washington’s army.

But what we, as members of the Ascendancy Church, did to the Catholics, was infamous beyond belief. As the Chief Justice of the day said ‘The law does not suppose any such persons to exist as an Irish Roman Catholic.’

By our studied and deliberate degradation of a proud and cultured people, we reduced them to a poverty stricken peasantry bereft of their natural leaders. We hounded their priests and denied them all possibility of education. We therefore set in train events that led eventually and inevitably to the starvation of the Famine years from 1845 onwards. This meant migration by the hundred thousand to the United States.

We are deeply sorry for these and many other such deeds, not in the

spirit of breast-beating, but in honesty and penitence. We know that we must realistically face them if we are ever to be trusted in the future. We know of many other situations in the world where an honest and penitent facing of the facts, instead of excusing ourselves, could lead to 'the creation of a society for which we all long.' It is to this end that we sign this document.

Each of us has lived in the North of Ireland for a number of years; was born in the South of Ireland; is a confirmed member of the Church of Ireland; is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin; believes we cannot expect our leaders to do and say what we are not prepared to do and say ourselves.

James Roderick Evans, F.R.C.S.I.

Elizabeth Muriel Porter, B.A.

William Arthur Porter, B.A.

Samuel Eric Turpin, M.Sc.

‘The Invisible Prison’, *the heartfelt feelings of*
Miss Joan Tapsfield,
a retired English senior civil servant who lived for eighteen years
in Northern Ireland.

My involvement in the life of Northern Ireland began in 1976 with an exploratory visit, which convinced me that my country, England, was responsible for many of the woes of Ireland, that Northern Ireland was still suffering from the events of that history, and that I should go there to live. I stayed for 18 years.

Some English churchmen and statesmen, who have made sincere apologies to the Irish on various occasions, now recognize that many of Ireland’s troubles are the result of British rule in the past.

But for the people of Northern Ireland the trouble is not all in the past – their history is still being made and still agonizing. They are locked in the situation we (the English/British) created over centuries, a ‘prison’ we try to improve and control but to which we have no key. So far from acknowledging our responsibility for their plight, we try to balance blame between the ‘inmates’.

Since coming back to England to live in 1995 I have become increasingly aware that most of us in this country regard the conflicts in Northern Ireland as entirely the fault of the people who live there. We sympathize with their tragedies but the causes are no concern of ours. When churches pray for ‘peace in Northern Ireland’ there is no sense of responsibility for the lack of peace. When those few who study the past admit – as some historians do – that Britain’s role as ruler of Ireland in the past has led to many of Northern Ireland’s problems, it is with a dismissive ‘sadly, we can do nothing about that now.’

So we continue on in contented ignorance.

A New Perspective

Seeing the situation as a ‘prison’ built by Britain in the past and maintained in the present, with no key to unlock it, demands a new, sympathetic look at it.

Using the terms 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' to denote the two main communities, both find future prospects alarming. Many Catholics, having experienced the untoward effect of British influence in the past, have no wish for it to be perpetuated and would prefer Northern Ireland to be part of a united Ireland. But the Protestants, who have hitherto been regarded as British and hold onto that identity tenaciously, dread such a possibility.

To them the statement in the Downing Street Declaration of 1993 that Britain has 'no further selfish strategic or economic interest' in maintenance of the Union was a threat. It was intended to free Northern Ireland to become part of a United Ireland, if and when its people so desired. But the Unionist heart of the Protestant people is united to Britain, through ties of historic loyalty and sacrifice in time of war. To them, the 'no further interest' statement had all the hurtfulness of loyal friendship used and rejected.

That sense of being abandoned has only been slightly mitigated by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which confirmed the right of all the people of Northern Ireland to choose their own future. Now the Protestant community has a sense of 'precarious belonging', foreseeing a future dictated by pragmatic necessity, with a constant need to defend themselves. Their reliance on being a permanent part of a United Kingdom has gone.

The new Devolved Government, created from two communities, one of which has a history of being oppressed and the other a history of being used and rejected, with all the emotional outcrop of these experiences, is a miracle in itself. However, the cessation of violence, welcome as it is, leaves a brave but uncertain Peace Process bedeviled by the fact that no constitutional arrangement can be fair to all Northern Ireland's people.

The sincere efforts of British statesmen to aid advancement are hampered by failure to realise that our country is part of the problem. The reluctance of the Protestants to agree to changes that diminish the power they held at the time of a 'Protestant parliament for a Protestant people' derives from a past engineered in British interests. Co-opted into the British establishment but never regarded as fully British, with their religion used as a bulwark against possible invasion from Catholic Europe, now dismissed when not required, they surely have cause to regard English manoeuvres with suspicion.

Feeling for the Future

My 18 years in Northern Ireland, with an ever-present sympathy for the Catholic community, also gave me an insight into the injuries inflicted on the Protestant people. This came more slowly, through the steady friendship of a Presbyterian, Dr. George Dallas and his Swiss wife Ruth. Memories of this time were evoked when I read the book written as a memorial to him. I recorded them:

‘On reading ‘The Second Conversion of Dr George Dallas’ ‘These are my people’ was a phrase often used by George Dallas in discussion – his illumination and acceptance of the wrongs done by his community did not detract from his strong sense of identity with the Protestant community in general and the Presbyterians in particular.

In the early days of our acquaintance, I made a critical remark about a group of Protestants I had met. George was upset and accused me of having contempt for ‘his people’. I apologized and said I had no such intention – but in reality I had no comprehension of his reaction. Slow to grasp it, I repeated the mistake several times before deciding never to mention Protestants en bloc in his presence. Even then, in my mind, I did not understand why he found the subject so hurtful coming from an English friend.

His reference to ‘the 1798’ led me to explore history, and a historical play in Derry opened my mind to the United Irishmen story and I began to see England’s divisive role, and what George meant by saying his community had suffered. English criticism of his community, ignoring English responsibility for its actions, was intolerable to him. Having accepted this in my mind, it was, never-the-less, sadly, a long time before I had any heart-understanding of what he felt.’

Now back in England, it seems to me that this experience is a symptom of our national outlook. The mist that obscured from me the feelings of a friend is the same mist that hides the true situation from people of goodwill here in England. It arises from our unconscious English nationalism, which closes minds to our own fallibility and edits the scant information we receive in the media to suit our own preconceptions.

Galvanising the Good Friday Agreement

This blinkered outlook could change if the Good Friday Agreement, made with such labour and sacrifice of long-held views by the parties concerned, was given the consideration it deserves. A constructive step in the Peace Process, it gives us ordinary people in England a chance to switch our outlook from blame to appreciative respect. And our opinions do affect what happens on the ground. They colour the decisions of politicians, the attitudes of officials and the behaviour of soldiers on the streets.

In Northern Ireland, where no settlement can be just to everyone, the only hope for a stable future lies in forgiving and seeking forgiveness. Our English part should be to seek forgiveness from those who live there, both the Irish and the British to whom it is their home. Nothing could do more towards crumbling the walls of mutual mistrust that obstruct the Peace Process at every turn. In Northern Ireland, small groups of people from different backgrounds and different churches, have emanated a spirit of fellowship which is significant enough to bring support to the Peace Process. Could not 'Churches Together' groups in England play a part in creating a concerned public opinion here?

J.T. June 2001

‘Challenge facing Britain on Northern Ireland outlined’
from *The Irish Times* 18th November, 1981, by
Leslie Fox,
All Saints Church, Dulwich.

British policies and actions in the past have led to the present intractable situation in Northern Ireland, the Moral Re-Armament movement was told recently.

In an address given at the movement’s headquarters in Caux, Switzerland, its Treasurer, Mr. Leslie Fox, a London accountant said:

“We British are worried about our inability to see any end to the troubles in Northern Ireland. This may be an inducement for us to consider the underlying causes of this problem, which is perhaps the most intractable in the world today.

For us British the tendency is to think that our job is to go into Northern Ireland to help these feuding Irishmen to sort it out. But there is another element in the deadlock and that is Britain. It is British policies and actions in the past that have led to the present intractable situation.

We in Britain are appallingly ignorant of Irish affairs and Irish history. But a recent BBC television series on Irish history by Robert Kee has opened the eyes of many people to the tragedies and sorrows of past centuries – largely caused by England.

It has revealed a seamy side to the English character – ruthlessness, deceit, divisiveness, superiority, indifference to suffering and the toleration of injustice. The question one then faces is – has our character changed so much since then? A letter in *The Times* asked ‘What has happened to the British character?’ implying that it has certainly not changed for the better.

Is it possible, then, that some of these same elements in our character are at work today? Canon Baker, Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons, in some study-notes on Ireland, has pointed out that a profile of character is handed down from one generation to another. He said ‘We all need to understand the character-patterns of our group, to guard against the revival, in appropriate circumstances of past crimes, follies and failures, and to replace bad tendencies with good ones.’

Is God wanting to use the anvil of the Irish problem to hammer out our character into a new shape for His purposes?

I resisted for some time the idea that my country's past policies were in any way responsible for the trouble in Northern Ireland. Then two years ago when I was present at Clonard Monastery in the Falls area of Belfast, where a group of Catholics and Protestants was studying the Bible together, I read in the second book of Peter, chapter 3, 'He does not wish any to perish, but all to betake them to repentance.' I had been studying the history of Ireland and those words riveted for me the thought that I and my country need to repent and change.

Some British people feel a sense of guilt about Ireland. But there is a difference between guilt and repentance. Guilt makes you shun the people you feel guilty about. Repentance means that you turn to God for forgiveness. He opens your heart to those you have wronged. They feel you understand, even if you cannot put everything right.

Later I apologised to a Catholic priest in Belfast for what we had done to the Irish people. He thanked me with real warmth. But then he said 'It is not only the injustices of the past, but the injustices of the present that matter to us.' I discovered that although only one third of the population was Catholic, over one-half of the young children were Catholic. 'So your people will be in the majority one day?' I said. 'Oh no,' he replied, 'they won't be able to get jobs. They will have to emigrate.'

I discovered that this had been going on since 1848 when the Catholic population rose to over 40% and the Protestants feared that they would be overwhelmed. This led to the exclusion of Catholics from Protestant areas of housing and employment. In recent years discrimination over housing has been eliminated and the Government is doing its best to eliminate discrimination over jobs. But in spite of new policies, what happens at street level is rather different. In some Catholic areas over 50% are out of work and there is a feeling of hopelessness. A Catholic friend of mine said 'While you have injustice you will have the IRA.'

And the Pope speaking in Ireland had a word for the politicians: 'Do not cause or condone or tolerate conditions which give excuse or pretext to the men of violence. Those who resort to violence always claim that only violence brings about change. They claim that political action cannot

achieve justice.’ This in no way excuses the violence of the IRA and I am aware that, in the background, conspiratorial forces plan to use the violence to advance their own dark plans for power.

And what about the wrongs we have done to the Protestant community? Canon Baker quoted in the Dublin paper, *The Irish Independent*, said: ‘We, the British, are also largely responsible for the fears and problems felt by the Protestant community in Northern Ireland. Having put them there to maintain an all-Ireland Union with Great Britain and encouraged them for generations to build their life around this, then we suddenly turned about and tried to abandon them to the very situation that they had been taught to resist at all costs.’

If we British are ever to find some light at the end of the long dark tunnel of Northern Ireland, there are five things we may have to face:

1. Face the past;
2. Face what it reveals about our past character;
3. Examine our personal and national behaviour today and face the fact that it may still be our character;
4. If so, face God and ask forgiveness, and then,
5. Face the present with new honesty.

To change the character of a nation takes time. Wilberforce did it for England in the 18th century when the abolition of the slave trade was the issue. It took a lifetime but it worked.

This is the challenge, focused by Northern Ireland, which is facing us as a nation today: to be honest with ourselves, to see what constructive changes are demanded of the British people and then to meet and study and pray and work until those changes take place. We shall need the help of other people and other nations in this task.

Father McCarthy of Clonard Monastery has what he calls a ‘dazzling vision’ of what England and Ireland working together could do for the rest of the world. What hope and fresh direction these two nations, united, could give to every hopeless situation in the world!

That is what God is calling some of us to. And I for one am ready to answer that call.”

*An article published in "The Furrow", January 1982, written by the
Right Reverend John Austin Baker,
theologian and then Bishop of Salisbury, and former Canon of Westminster
Abbey and Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons.*

IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

This article is an attempt to do two things. First, to identify without illusion or false hope, the main obstacles to peace in Northern Ireland – taking peace in its biblical sense not only of the absence of destructive conflict but also of creative well-being, a fullness both of spiritual, social and economic life. Secondly to ask what, given these particular obstacles, can be done now to move things in a more promising direction. Because I am a theologian, not a politician or an economist, it tackles these questions from a Christian theological angle. It is, in fact, a piece of political theology. Because I am a stranger, it will be full of over-simplifications and errors. But perhaps one or two insights may, by the mercy of God, be fresh and helpful.

The Unity of Ireland

It is sometimes said that the North-East has always been different from the rest of the island, and kept itself to itself, that its people are distinctive. This, if true, would not necessarily be relevant to the question of peace within the North-East. It only becomes so, because some people living in the North-East want to unite that area with the rest of the island. Are they proposing a manifest absurdity in terms of deep, underlying ethnic and cultural facts? This is a complex question, but certain comments occur to me.

First, if you take the history of the island as a whole, you can make a good case for a number of other divisions. By quite a few very important criteria you could argue as forcefully that the real distinction was originally between the East Central zone and the peripheral areas of North, West and South-West. Or again, Lynch and Vaizey's 'two Irelands', the rural, subsistence economy Ireland and maritime, commercial Ireland, do not correspond to the North-East and the rest; and modern qualifications of their theory tend more toward an East West contrast. Secondly, where the North-East has been separate and distinct, it has not been for the same

reasons. The seclusion of Ulster under the O'Neills was the result of factors almost the exact opposite of those that isolate it today. We have to ask not just was Ulster separate, but why? Thirdly, we tend to forget how fragmented all the areas of land we call our modern 'nations' were in the Middle Ages, and even beyond. France, Italy, Germany, Spain, all were shifting patterns of semi-autonomous units. In some cases these tensions continue to this day, in others they have been overcome in one way or another. Past independence does not necessarily mean present divorce, though it may be called upon to justify a divorce desired for other reasons. Fourthly, there are within Great Britain differences quite as radical as any that divide Northern Ireland from the rest, but these do not make political unity impossible. Ironically, M.W. Heslinga's thesis that Ulster today is a continuation across the Irish Sea of the North-South division in Great Britain can be used to argue that a united Ireland is no more impossible than was the union of England, Scotland and Wales.

No. If the idea of a united Ireland is the supreme topic of contention in Northern Ireland – as it is – then the reasons must be looked for in more obvious places than the misty past of culture and anthropology. We have to ask what it is that makes differences, which in other societies can be tolerated, intolerable here, even in contemplation. For what we have in Northern Ireland is the sight of one section of the people, the majority, saying to the rest: 'We could never live in a country where you were in the majority.' Now that is deeply hurtful; it is an insult. (The nearest thing I know to that attitude is the feeling of many white people towards Asians and Africans in Britain. And it is felt as an insult there, and is the reason for the hatred and tension that ravage community relations in many parts of England). We have to be quite clear that this rejection of the minority, this sense of alienation from them as not sharing certain basic values essential to a tolerable society, is the reason for devotion to the United Kingdom, not the other way round. The majority in Northern Ireland do not have such a wonderful opinion of the English or of Westminster government. These are simply evils that have to be borne lest a worse thing befall. Which means, I would guess, that the rope that holds Protestant Ulster from UDI is pretty thin, and might well in certain circumstances snap.

If we ask what is the reason for this alienation, we come to the greatest of all our obstacles to peace: history. My own insight into the living force of history in Northern Ireland affairs began simply enough with a television news broadcast in the year of the power-sharing experiment. The cameras were filming an encounter between Brian Faulkner and Ian Paisley on the steps of Stormont, and the microphones picked up the one word hurled by Paisley at the Prime Minister – ‘Lundy’. The history of a Christian people really is a living thing to them when the name of one relatively minor character of 300 years ago becomes their equivalent of ‘Judas’.

The Legacy of History

But when we talk of ‘history’, what do we mean? There are many who insist that we need to distinguish in all countries but especially in Ireland and Northern Ireland between ‘myth’ and ‘legend’ and ‘history’, between the simple, partisan, emotional, popular presentation of the nation’s story and the facts as research discovers them. The power lies in the ideal pictures that various groups have of the past. There is certainly truth in this. Nor is it all that much worse in Ireland than in some other places. If we ask why relations between Great Britain and France are always so precarious, the answer lies largely in this popular, constructive history on both sides of the Channel. Compared with the 900-year story of animosity and arrogance between the English and the French, the conflict with Germany was a mere temporary estrangement, which is why the UK and France both find it easier to get on with Germany than with each other. In Wales, the facts will never catch up with the legend of Tonypany. And so it would seem to be in Ireland. But recognizing this fact does little to deal with it, and may anaesthetize one to the real issue. For if we talk long enough about myths and legends, we come in the end to believe that they spring from nothing much more worth talking about, that somehow it is all in the minds of the combatants, a sort of phantasy; and then we are in serious danger.

It is of prime and urgent importance to insist that there are terrible facts in Irish history. What scientific critical research uncovers is truly appalling. We need to say loud and clear, not: ‘Forget the stories, they are only myths,’ but: ‘Forget the myths, because the truth is bad enough.’ If we will not do this, then we shall end up ascribing everything to malicious

invention. The trouble is not just in people's minds, but also in *their* minds – 'they' being the other side. The obstacle then becomes the hostility and inflexibility of the opposition, which is all the more evil for being based, as we suppose, on lies.

I am going to write now something that may shock you but which I believe to be theologically sound. We must accept that the things our enemies do are in a way justified. You cannot say this of all human situations but it can properly be said of most. I need not add, I am sure, that I also mean it to be applied even-handedly to both sides.

This sounds un-Christian, unethical, almost perverted. When we consider the story of Belfast over the last 140 years, and the huge number of innocent people who have suffered and died from rioting and terrorism in that time, how can we say any of it was justified? Murder is always wrong, whoever commits it. To claim justification is surely to fall into the trap which Bishop Cahal Daly so acutely pinpointed when he said: "... *whataboutery* is one of the commonest forms of evasion of personal moral responsibility".

In fact, however, it is not. Bishop Daly was not saying that questions such as: "What about the sectarian killings?" or "What about the brutalities of the Brits?" had no basis in fact, that there were no such things as just grievances. He was saying that just grievances are no sort of open warrant to do what we like, no 'licence to kill'. In this he was wholly faithful to the New Testament injunction: 'Render to no one evil for evil.' What I am trying to say is that along with our moral responsibility not to render evil for evil we have a companion duty to recognize that our own evil has given grounds for the evil done to us. We are not in the position of sinless martyrs turning the other cheek to baseless violence. The violence is wrong, and has to be restrained and punished; but it has a moral dimension to it.

We find it hard to accept this for many reasons. The victims of individual acts of violence may be personally quite innocent. One thinks of the children on both sides who have been killed. The idea of corporate guilt is hard to take. Why should we be blamed for matters in which we had no hand? And when we are held guilty for crimes committed long before we were born, we revolt in anger. Anyway, what has all this to do with the Christian concept of a God of love and forgiveness?

Just anger but corporate responsibility

But, of course, the biblical concept of God, even in the New Testament, is *not* solely one of love and forgiveness. It is a basic theme of the Bible and of Our Lord's preaching that in God there is such a thing as just anger against evil, and that this may take a form that the sinner will find terrifying and destructive. This would be quite meaningless except on the assumption that certain kinds of evil do morally justify retribution. Justice is not an evil but a good. The point about love and forgiveness is not that they replace what would otherwise be wrong, but that at terrible cost they find a way beyond what justice demands without themselves becoming evil in the process.

Unless we accept this, much of St. Paul, for example, becomes incomprehensible. Furthermore, true contrition does involve us in acknowledging not just that we have done wrong but that we have deserved certain consequences. It would not be a sin in the people we have offended if they were to reject us or to inflict on us other kinds of pain or loss. Only when we accept that as right can we truly value the love that foregoes such rights. It is by neglect of this fundamental moral fact that so much Christian preaching today fails to make contact with the moral sense of ordinary people, because it seems to say that their deep rooted intuition about justice is unfounded and morally deficient. But, we must go on to say, there are uncomfortable consequences from recognizing the validity of justice. For we too have sinned, and we thereby acknowledge the right of others to hurt us. Their exercise of this right may be disproportionate or indiscriminate or in other ways contaminated by evil; but these things are corruptions of something basically morally justifiable, as, it may be, are all human sentences, even those carried out by due process of law. And to say this is to say, in Ireland and Northern Ireland, where grievous mutual hurt has been done by all the parties concerned, that there is a root of justice to all the violence, however distorted it has become.

This does, indeed, also involve us in accepting the idea of corporate responsibility. There is a saying of Our Lord on this question which causes a good deal of difficulty. It comes in St. Matthew, chapter 23: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, saying, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding

the blood of the prophets.” Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers ... that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of the innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation.’ (Vv.29-32, 35-36) Leaving aside the moral quality of this for the moment, it is at any rate a pattern with which we are familiar in history – the French and Russian Revolutions are two obvious examples. And we are today in just such a situation in Northern Ireland – but is there any moral justification for this being so? At least in this way, that as regards the dominant groups in any community, the situation in which they find themselves and the benefits they enjoy is their moral responsibility. If this situation is the result of past injustice, then by acquiescing in it for their own advantage they become blameworthy in respect of the injustice that created it.

Community values

There is a further consideration which Our Lord’s words seem to imply. A community is, as we say nowadays, a carrier of values. We imbibe from the group in which we are brought up attitudes, priorities, and ways of dealing with people and things. There is a recognizable profile to the character of the group, passed down from generation to generation, much like a family face or family failings. Often these characteristics are developed for survival in hostile circumstances and are cherished and perpetuated for that reason. They seem the well-proven way of preserving both ourselves and what we believe in. Inevitably, then, given a particular situation, the members of the group will react in traditional ways. The Scribes and Pharisees did *not* approve of violence or of killing prophets; but, put under pressure, the atavistic tendencies proved too strong, and they crucified the Lord of glory and persecuted his followers. We all need to understand the character-patterns of our own group, to subject them to a critique; to guard against the revival, in appropriate circumstances, of past crimes, follies and failures; to replace bad tendencies with good ones. If we do not, then we share in the guilt of our predecessors and will one day ‘fill up the measure of our fathers’. Blind loyalty to the group past is a form of sin, and by failing to

disown it we identify ourselves with former crimes and must stand in the dock with those who committed them. In Northern Ireland today all three main groups in the society of the Province – Loyalists, Republicans and British – stand in the dock. All are filling up the measure of their fathers; all uphold or fail to disown the wrongs in their group pasts; all have to some extent justified the crimes committed against them. It is not for me to spell out that statement in respect of Loyalists and Republicans: but I do want to say one or two things about the British.

Britain and Partition

This is all the more necessary because of an attitude which I think I detect in Westminster today. It seems to me that the British government, supported in this by most M.P.s, is treating Northern Ireland as if a line had been drawn under the account in 1972 when direct rule began. They are conscious of the damage that can be done by brooding on history, and of the use that is made of it, in endless arguments, to justify everyone's present attitudes, and they appear to think that the best way to deal with this is to refuse to discuss it. There must be a new start. One can sympathize with them in this attempt to cut the knot but, for reasons already stated, it will not work. The present is the living expression of the past, the past (to coin an Irishism) in contemporary form. Only with an approach that acknowledges the past and finds some way of dealing with it, can we hope to succeed.

In particular, moreover, this 'new start' attitude is doomed to failure because part of the living and effective past is the British past. Politicians in England tend to talk as though we had had nothing to do with the situation until we were brought in to sort out feuding Northern Irelanders. Exactly what is our special contribution to the mess could provide material for long and acrimonious debate. Two things, however, can be said.

First, we encouraged Protestant settlement in Ireland to secure the island against invasion by Catholic European powers that would give them an overwhelming strategic advantage against England. We did this by expropriating Irish farmers and peasants land, making over their land to the newcomers. The methods were time-honoured; Julius Caesar did the same sort of thing. The policy was prudent, indeed essential. Nevertheless it was

an injustice to the Catholic Gaels and a reasonable grievance. But it has also given rise to a less noticed but equally just grievance on the part of the Protestants. Our intention in putting them there was to create and maintain a Protestant all-Ireland state. Because our methods were largely compounded of injustice, atrocities and callous neglect we rendered the enterprise ultimately hopeless. It had no moral foundations: and so, in the end, we were inevitably forced to abandon it. This meant that we were also forced to abandon the friends who had gone there at our behest, and had attempted, no doubt quite willingly in many cases, to carry out our foolish and indefensible policies. The scattered Protestant minority in the south, centre and west, could exert no pressure on us, and were left to sink or swim in a Catholic state. The concentrated Protestant majority in the north-east were strong enough to force us into Partition as a means of protecting their integrity as a community. My point is this: they were justified in treating us this way, because, had they not, we would have had no compunction whatever in going back on the entire reason for bringing them into existence. To this day the Loyalists (ironic name!) know perfectly well that only threats will keep the British faithful to their interests, and in their heart-of-hearts English politicians all wish Catholics and Protestants could be reconciled, so that Southern Ireland and Northern Ireland could come together, and the whole problem go away. Hence the suspicion of such events as the recent talks in Dublin and the pressure of certain Northern Ireland M.P.s at Westminster to secure irreversible integration of the Province into the United Kingdom.

Secondly, we created the present deadlock in Northern Ireland. The idea of Partition was tentatively put forward in Parnell's time, and Ulster Protestants organized even then in support of it. But it would be wrong, in my opinion, to blame Partition purely on Protestant intransigence. Partition was the result of British policies. It was made inevitable by the misgovernment that set one section of the people against another. It cannot be too often repeated that conflict in Ireland is not a religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics as such but between two sets of people who happen to be one Protestant, the other Catholic. That religious differences have been invoked on each side and at every stage, to evoke a crusading spirit, to explain the depravity of the enemy, and to stiffen and perpetuate hostility, is true. But

fundamentally, it was for political and military reasons that Catholics were persecuted and Protestants planted: it was in obedience to economic theories that Catholics were made destitute and starving; it was as the landless that Catholics took to the gun against the property owners, of whom many, as a result of English policies, were Protestants. It is interesting to note that in an otherwise excellent letter to *The Times* some weeks ago, Lord Hylton lamented the absence of genuine pluralism in Ireland and Northern Ireland, but failed to mention that this was a direct result of British government policies. Political parties, religious groupings and nationalist movements coincided in each camp. The pattern of Radical versus Conservative, for instance, or a proper Labour Party, never had a chance to emerge, because the pressures made one controversy determine all alignments.

The impasse of evil

It is, after all, fair to say that no one thought of the island of Ireland as two distinct political entities until generations of neglect and stupidity suggested this solution to some people's minds as a way out of an intolerable situation. The tragic series of missed opportunities in the second half of the nineteenth century, moreover, ensured that when Partition came it would bring with it three particular evils that are at the root of our present trouble. First, the opportunity was lost to give the whole island a secular constitution within the framework of which Protestant and Catholic would be on a genuinely equal footing, a constitution like that of the Dominions. Instead, there emerged two partisan constitutions, each with regrettable and offensive elements. To an observer the claim of the Republic to the whole island and the defiance of this claim by the Protestant North are both wholly understandable, and both the bitter fruit of English rule. Secondly, because the population of the island has always been a mix in every area, albeit an uneven one, the result was bound to be two regions, each with a strong religious and ideological character and each with permanent minorities to whom that character would be hateful. Thirdly, by transforming a Protestant minority in the whole island into a majority in part of it, Partition ensured that what was naturally felt by Republicans as impudent robbery and fraud could properly be defended by Protestants as the democratic will of the people.

Dreadful as the terrorist activities of the paramilitary groups are and urgent though it is to extinguish them, they are but symptoms. The disease is the long-term impasse we have described. And that is essentially a fatal legacy that England has bequeathed to the people of this island.

Theologically it bears the distinguishing mark of true evil, namely that there is no right answer to the problem it poses. There is no rational step forward which is not open to fatal objections, not least because of the element of moral justification for the hard line taken by each side. Now what do we do about evil? That is not only a religious question, but almost exclusively a Christian religious question, since political programmes, social engineering, moral exhortation are all equally ineffective in face of it, and other faiths hardly consider it.

The first thing to do about evil is to acknowledge its existence and its peculiar power. This step is itself creative. It is creative for the individual because it means confessing that we are defeated, and that our personal schemes and remedies are inadequate. It is facing facts in a way that attention to 'problems' is not. We may face the statistics of terrorism, poverty, unemployment, and so forth; but that is not to face the evil of these things. We may listen bravely to the voices of prejudice, fanaticism and hatred; but that is not to face the evil of these things. Having digested all, we may truly say: 'How terrible! Cannot people see how wrong this is? Let us beg them to stop' or 'Let us ban these utterances as subversive.' That does not face the evil, which is that those who say such things believe them to be true, and would think it wrong to keep silent. What do you do about that?

But acknowledging defeat is also more especially creative for a community. Why? Because it creates fellowship, it binds together. To say together, 'Our methods are getting us nowhere, our various policy objectives are only such as to make things worse,' is already to talk about 'Us', where before it was 'Me and my lot', 'Them and their lot'. The only thing that unites Loyalists and Republicans at a deep level and equally unites with them the people of Great Britain, is our common failure, our inability to offer even a plausible answer to the misery of Northern Ireland. To accept this is, of course, something else as well, because it means admitting to each other that our own answers, bred out of our group history, are no good.

Integration with the UK, UDI, power sharing, union with the Republic: as things are, each of these, the four main options, is an invitation to disaster. The start must be to face this fact. In theology we call it the need for redemption, the fact that we cannot save ourselves.

Such a move is also an act of true penitence, because it means admitting that the behaviour of the other groups springs from desires that are not inherently wicked, and that, by fighting our own corner, we are frustrating these justifiable ambitions.

JAB January 1982