

CONCLUSION

Professor John Brewer, one of the leading analysts of the conflicts in Northern Ireland and South Africa, and a proponent of reconciliation initiatives, has theorised that sectarianism and other forms of difference exist at three levels – the social structure, the level of ideas, and the level of individual behaviour (see Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland 1600-1998, by Brewer with Higgins, 1998, Macmillan Press). They must therefore be challenged at each of these three levels. The Church of Ireland is well placed to work imaginatively at the level of the social structure through its public role, in education and the media, and where church representation is afforded on public bodies; and parish ministry is, if nothing else, concerned with the ideas and individual experience of parishioners. The church can challenge existing unhelpful norms and encourage the development of fresh thinking and behaviour through holistic Christ-centred ministry. In this regard, the Church of Ireland is facing a similar challenge to most churches in the Western world of the early 21st century. Christendom has crumbled, and post-modern values are becoming entrenched as the social norm. Ignoring or complaining about this will not undermine the fact of its existence as the context in which the church is called to minister. Christ incarnated many roles – of which the peacemaker, the healer, the social critic, the proposer of wide-reaching welcome, the non-violent bringer of justice, and the culturally relevant missionary are only a few. But these must be among the priorities of ministry for the church in a post-modern world. So, in simple terms, this study encourages the following general steps:

- The Church of Ireland may need to help its clergy and parishioners *understand* themselves, and the changing world in which they live.
- The Church of Ireland may need to address and educate its members in the *whole gospel*. Neither pietism nor solely political gospels provide the whole answer to the human condition. Clergy need to be resourced to preach more than pietism; and the strategic priorities of the church should reflect practical action in the keystone areas of sectarianism and other forms of difference.
- The Church of Ireland may need to recognise the core implications of this study for the whole church. The issues of sectarianism and difference will not be resolved by a committee or an education project alone. The Church of Ireland may need to re-evaluate the role of the clergy in contemporary society, and be prepared to consider a much greater role for lay people in ministry.
- The Church of Ireland may need to be prepared to take risks, and perhaps 'lose' in the short term if it is to incarnate such a radical gospel. Members may leave. Property may be lost.

People may be misunderstood. But that was Jesus' lot also. Success in Jesus' view appeared to be less to do with increasing numbers and fortunes and more connected with the substance of redeeming and healing the world. If the church is not willing to lead by example in this area, then it has probably ceded its authority to a business model rather than the ministry of the suffering servant. And there is much in this report that should affirm and encourage the steps the SEP and the church are continuing to take in this direction.

It is appropriate that the last word be reserved for a member of the Church of Ireland:

I know people in all faith and honesty are doing their best...I would go back many years...but it took so long for us to walk over and shake the other person's hand, and in the same way that's where we're struggling through times when we should be twenty steps on rather than where we are at the moment. And again, to be making peace, but peace on our terms, or peace with our flock in mind isn't necessarily peace, and it mightn't even be the right starting point. Making peace looks at the rightness of the situation, not trying to support our own church or our own group. And if we have to make hard decisions and we lose what we call support because of them, well that's fine. That's my view, anyway. So maybe...this [is] the first step in that. -

Anonymous respondent