

Divided Past - Shared Future

Churches addressing the
legacy of the Troubles

3 November, 2007
Belfast Bible College, Dunmurry
Cost: £30 (£25 concession)

Belfast Bible College

Our conference this year will be held at Belfast Bible College, Glenburn Road South, Dunmurry. The college has plenty of parking.

Programme

- 9.30 Coffee & Registration
- 10.00 Welcome
- 10.15 Keynote Address
*Between Sentimentality and Cynicism:
The Churches' Contribution to Remembering the Political Past*
Nigel Biggar
- 11.15 Coffee
- 11.45 Seminars
- 12.45 Lunch
- 1.45 Panel Discussion
- 2.45 Group Workshop - the past belongs to us all
- 4.00 Closing remarks

Cover image by Lynda Gould: Peace Wall, Springfield Road, Belfast

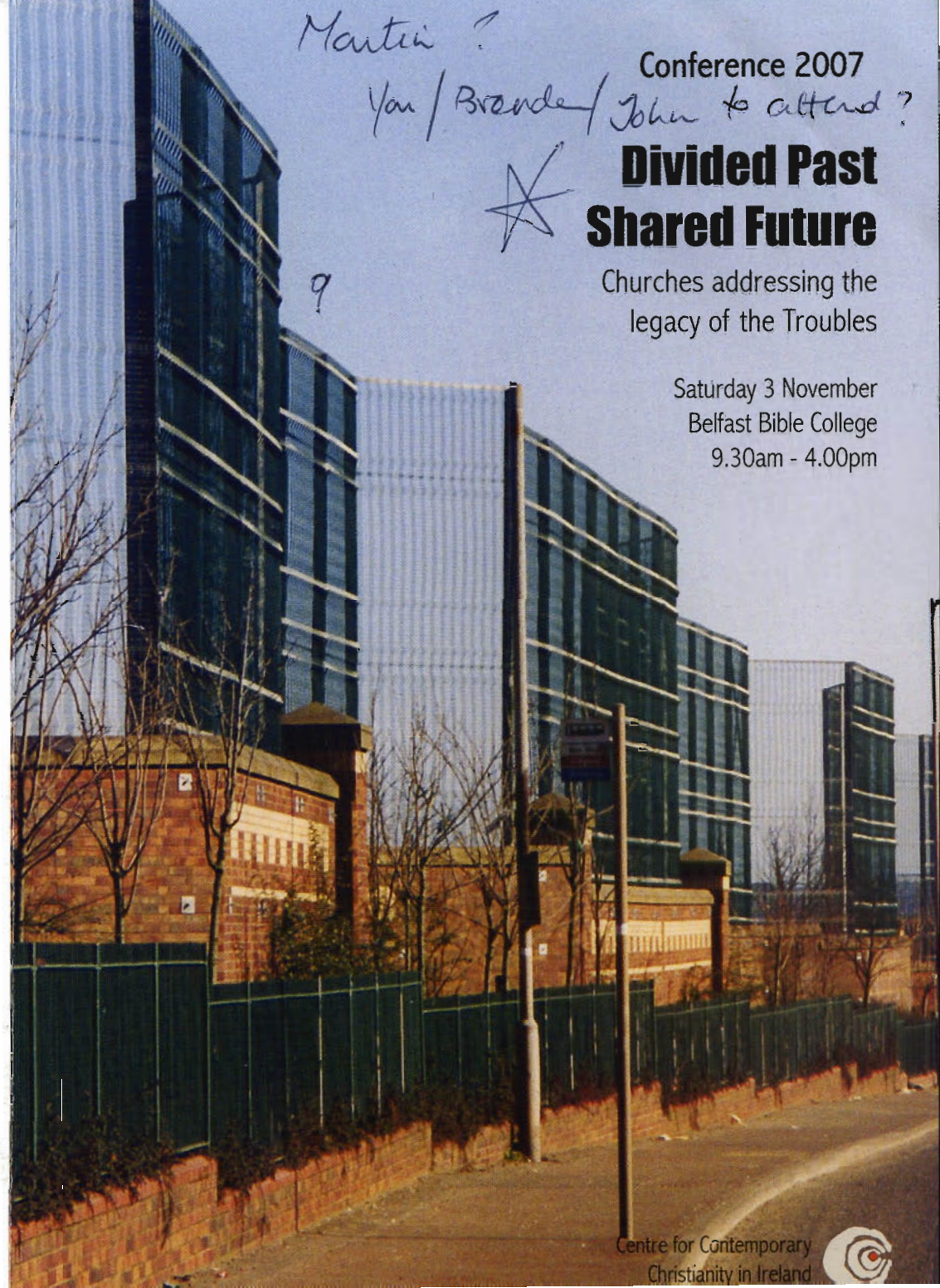


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Conference 2007

Handwritten: Martin?
You / Brandon / John to attend?

Divided Past Shared Future

Churches addressing the
legacy of the Troubles

Saturday 3 November
Belfast Bible College
9.30am - 4.00pm

Centre for Contemporary
Christianity in Ireland



Divided Past – Shared Future

Churches addressing the legacy of the Troubles

In May 2007, Northern Ireland's political leaders took major steps towards the final settlement of a communal conflict spanning nearly 40 years. Over the coming months, the Programme for Government will set out their policy for the future. Alongside economic and social policies, will there be a commitment to the vision of a shared future?

A truly shared future requires an honest conversation about the nature of our diverse society and how we learn to live with our deepest differences. We cannot have honest conversations about the future without talking about the legacy of our divided past. How else can we ensure the past is not repeated?

What is the church's role in addressing the legacy of the Troubles? How can Christian faith enable and equip us to bring healing to the wounds of history? There are elements in our own story that we need to confront. Do we have the courage to be open about our own entanglements with the conflict and the nature of our commitment to making peace and doing justice?

These themes are at the heart of what it means for Christians to be good news in our society at this critical moment in its struggle to be at peace. Our invited speakers have thought hard about the challenges which this struggle poses for both the churches and wider society. We also want to hear what you think – the events of the last thirty-five years have provided the context for all our personal life stories. It is your past too – join us and share in the debate.

Keynote Address

Between Sentimentality and Cynicism:

The Churches' Contribution to Remembering the Political Past

No act of remembering will raise the dead and not all remembering will heal the past. Yet the need to honour those who have given their lives for justice is a deep human instinct, and the duty to remember past misdeeds is embedded in the ethos of Christian thought and culture.

But can we agree on who the heroes and villains of conflict are? Is confession of wrongdoing possible in the public sphere? And can forgiveness work at the political level?



These are some of the difficult questions Nigel Biggar will address as he helps us discern what kind of remembering Christian hope calls us to and Christian patience invites us wait for.

Nigel Biggar was recently appointed Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford University having been Professor of Theology and Ethics at Trinity College Dublin. He is editor of *Burying the Past: Making Peace and Doing Justice after Civil Conflict*.

Seminars

You will have the opportunity to attend one of three seminars

» Close the books for now

John Dunlop, former Presbyterian Moderator and President of CCCI

Northern Ireland has come through chaotic and painful times. However there is no shared interpretation of the meaning of our collective suffering and consequently we understand the events of the past in different and contentious ways. Acting on calls to open up past events for examination will potentially deepen our wounds and unsettle the present political accommodation. This seminar will explore the consolidation of the fragile political process and practical generosity as the over-riding priorities in building a future together.

» Remembering Begins with Peace

Geraldine Smyth, Lecturer, Irish School of Ecumenics

Ireland, in its history of conflict, has been characterised as having an “excess of memory”. But no cure will be found through “an excess of forgetting”. In this seminar Geraldine Smyth will focus on the necessity of memory and commemoration in the hope of uncovering the creative relationship between remembrance of loss and the hope of newness.

» Making Peace with the Past

Kate Turner, Project Co-ordinator, Healing Through Remembering

Over the last five years the Healing Through Remembering project has brought together a range of individuals, of diverse political opinions, to focus on the effects of the history of conflict in Northern Ireland and the possibility of individual and community healing through a process of remembering. In this seminar Kate Turner will consider a series of linked strategies to promote healing ranging from a story-telling archive to a permanent living memorial museum.

Panel Discussion

A panel of local community, political and church leaders will specifically address the church's own legacy in relation to the past. In particular they will discuss what the churches need to acknowledge about their own failings in our conflict and consider how the church can now have a credible hearing in wider society.

Group Workshop – the past belongs to us all

This is an opportunity for you to express your perspective on the role and contribution of the church in dealing with the past and building the future. The format will involve small group discussion providing an opportunity for you to reflect on what you have heard throughout the day and to share your opinion and experience in this debate.