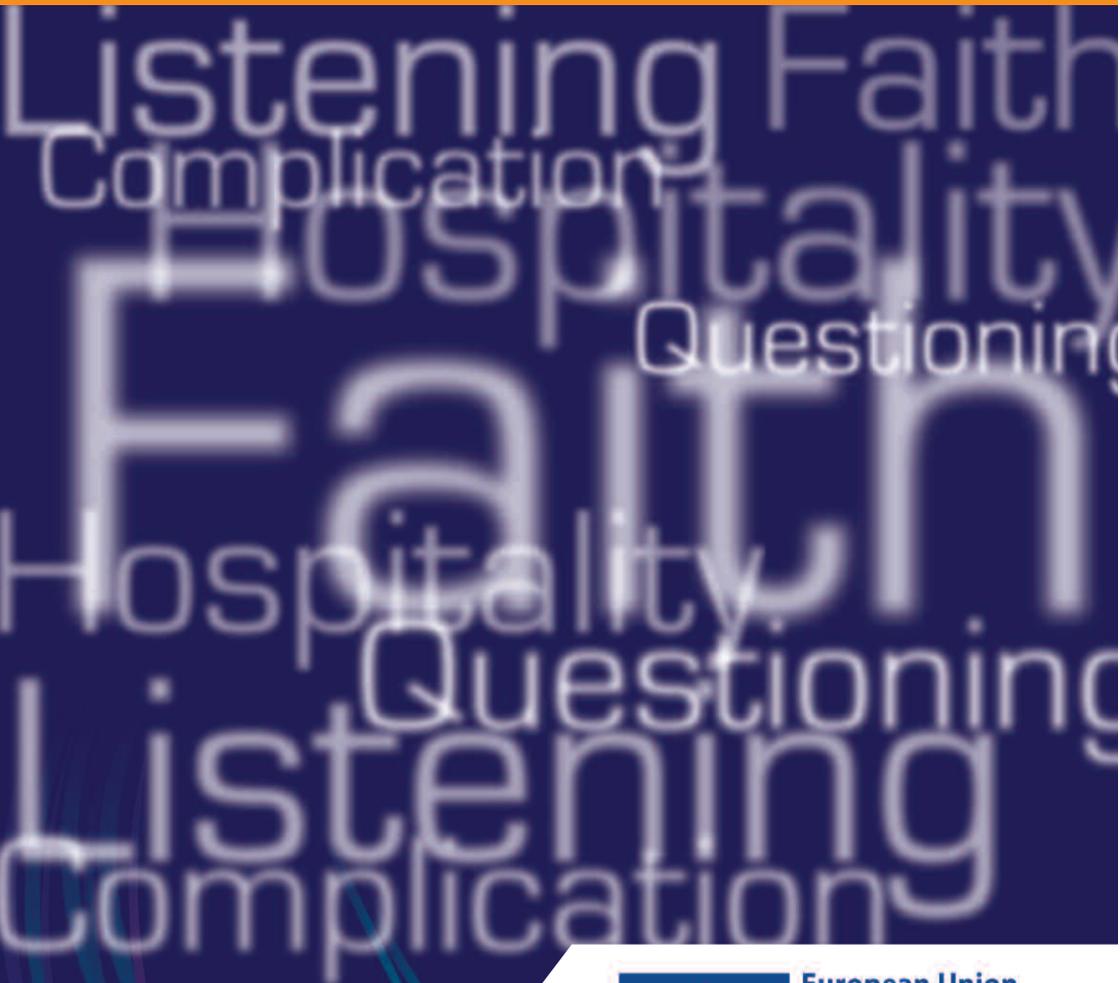


irish peace centres

An Integrated Approach to Peace-Building

Studying Faith, Practising Peace



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Dedication:

In honour of the Stevens family - David, Mathilde, Thomas and Naomi.

Foreword

This is the fourth paper in the IPC series of Experiential Learning papers which is intended to provide short examinations and analysis of issues which are arising in the work of peace-building practitioners and to disseminate them widely within the sector. This collection brings together voices of theology who have something to say about peace. Some are new voices to public discourse and others have been heard across the years. In answer to the question “Do theological studies make a tangible and practical contribution to peace on the Island of Ireland”, these voices each choose a starting point, and each arrive at their own unique ending point.

There are people in this contribution who have critical things to say about theology, or about politics, or about society. There are people who articulate hope, and others who articulate grief. Some think that theological studies do contribute tangibly to peace, and others think that theological studies could contribute tangibly to peace.

Theological studies may seem a fringe topic in the wider field of peace-building but it comes under one of the work programmes of IPC which concerns itself with issues of faith, peace and conflict.

I wish to thank all of the contributors who engage here honestly with the issues. And I wish to say a special word of thanks to IPC field-worker Pdraig O'Tuama who took the lead in this entire project.

Peter Sheridan OBE
Chairperson
Irish Peace Centres



Faith and Peace
Artist: Jayne McConkey

Introduction. The art of questioning.

A number of years ago, I arrived home at my house on the lower Falls in Belfast. A crowd of late teenaged lads was gathered near my house. This was not unusual. I knew them all, and regularly hunted them out from my back yard at nighttime when they climbed over my fence to fill bottles of water to assist in their nocturnal hallucinatory bong-journeys. However, on this occasion, they were sober, cordial and in the mood for a chat. After a few daft pleasantries, one of them asked me what I did. I hemmed and hawed around the question. I had imbibed the Belfast reluctance for giving too much information away. The truth was that I worked mostly on the Shankill Road, while living on the neighbouring Falls Road. This was not information I was keen to divulge.

I gave a vague answer - "I do some work in schools, some work at Clonard monastery, and I study theology." I was shocked at the enthusiastic response. Four of the lads crowded around me. "What do you think of the Da Vinci Code, Pádraig?" one of them asked. I did not hum and haw. I said that it made for entertaining distraction, but I wouldn't be taking much theological fact from it. My opinion was barely listened to. In the way of many questions, the question had been asked in order for the questioner to give his own answer. "I think it's shite," he said, "Jesus was a Catholic. He wouldn't have married a whore."

I am telling you the truth. I have neither added to nor subtracted from this interchange.

Jesus was a Catholic. He wouldn't have married a whore. The guy was telling me that he believed that Jesus was just like him. And, because Jesus was just like him, he knew what Jesus would do and wouldn't do.

While some may blame religion for the thought processes that led to this youth's statement, I think differently. Theology, as I see it, is less about giving the facts, and more about asking questions that may unsettle unexamined assumptions in order for all to grow deeper into an understanding and a living of the truth.

In the event, I said to the guys outside my house: "I believe you'll find that Jesus was a Jew". They laughed. It seemed like the first time they'd heard that. I could have said that the text does not describe Mary Magdalene as a prostitute. I could have asked them what they thought of the people who keep the sex industry in motion. I could have spoken about Hosea who did, under divine instruction, marry a prostitute. The question I wish I'd asked them, and a question that I think is deeply theological is this:

What if Jesus wasn't your kind of Catholic?

Now, the conversation would have needed careful negotiation. There would have been need for good time and the right tone for the talking. I would have learned something about them. They may have learned something about me. We could have learned something about how we see truth. We would have discovered something about belonging and something about exclusion, something about blame and something about responsibility. We could have grown together into a more truthful living of diversity and friendship.

There is a Snoopy cartoon depicting the beloved beagle working on a typewriter while perched on top of his kennel. Charlie Brown approaches him and says "I hear you're writing a book of theology. I hope you have a good title". Snoopy, looking somewhat superior, responds with "I have the perfect title". The title appears in the sky, in typface, "Have you ever considered that you might be wrong?"

Snoopy's proposed title for his theological oeuvre strikes at the heart of things. In a world where theological reflection has often been relegated to the side, and where reciprocity is the currency in politics, Snoopy poses for us a question of courage. The ability to look at ones own ideology, and to pre-empt attack by opening the heart, by examining one's opinions and one's actions non defensively and in truth is a profoundly theological ability.

In January 2010, an Irish Language expert for the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Peadar Heffron, was seriously injured by a bomb that exploded under his car. As it stands, nobody has been found guilty of this incident. I imagine that those who planted the device saw Peadar as a Judas character - a betrayer. It was his injury or death that was wanted. The shedding of Peadar's brave blood was perceived as a sacrifice needed in the name of a cause. There are questions to be asked of the perpetrators of this event. The questions are: How are you dealing with the ones from among you who are asking if you're wrong? And why are you dealing with them in this way? And if there is nobody vocalising these questions, why do you think that is? These are meant to be an unsettling question.

From January to June 2010, I coordinated a project that gathered theological students across the island of Ireland for a project under the Irish Peace Centres' Faith in Positive Relations programmes. We, women and men, Catholic and Protestant, denominational and non-denominational, from north and south of the border, clergy and laity, young(ish) and older(ish), local and international, gathered together on three occasions to hear each other and to speak with each other. A question was posed: "Do theological studies contribute tangibly and practically to peace on the island of Ireland?"

In true theological style the question wasn't answered directly. Indeed, the question is fairly unanswerable. Rather, the question was approached. It was examined, discussed, defined and undefined. The question is approached, in this publication, with story, generosity, history, scripture, philosophy, hospitality, politics, pain, devotion, protest and celebration.

The Irish Peace Centres has an aim of an integrated approach to peace building. There are stated aims of improving trust and tolerance, increasing contacts in a previously unknown group, for the purposes of improving social capital and stronger civil society. In short, the Irish Peace Centres aims to help facilitate friendship between people who previously would have not met each other - for reasons of geography, opinion, experience or time. These theological voices see that their contribution to peace comes in the form of ask important and sometimes difficult questions. What if Jesus isn't your kind of person? What if religion challenged rather than justified your sense of belonging? Can difficult questions lead to more peaceful engagements with each other? How do we speak together?

One of the intriguing questions that arose was “What is the unique theology of Peace coming from the Island of Ireland?” Our second meeting date, on May 27th, was postponed in order to allow a number of us to attend the funeral service for David Stevens, the late leader of the Corrymeela Community. Described as one of the finest theologians of peace in Ireland, David's formal study was in Chemistry.

David Stevens was a salty character with good questions, unsettling stories and a great capacity for reality. It is to David and Mathilde, together with their children Thomas and Naomi, that this collection is dedicated. David told stories that made us question our presumed benevolence and impartiality. I first encountered him when he interrupted me while I was talking about theology with a friend in a coffee shop. He wanted to give an opinion to what I was saying. In the end, neither of us was wrong and neither was exactly right and a friendship developed. David lived his theological commitment to truth, peace and commitment. This is one of the embodied tasks of Theology and, at its best, theological enquiry can be fearless in asking questions of everybody - beginning with the questioner.

The approaches here do not all say the same thing. We speak for ourselves. We agreed and we disagreed with each other. They are full of opinion, story, scholarship and perspective. We learned, by being a gathered group of people from different theological approaches, different religious ideologies and identities, people with experience of violent conflict and people with no experience of violent conflict. The art displayed in between each contribution is the work of Jayne McConkey, and it aims to capture the discussion, and the tone of respect offered to each other, especially when different perspectives were being explored.

a beautiful theology



is a lived theology

What Ireland Needs Is More Sectarian Fundamentalists

Kevin Hargaden

Introduction: Defining Terms

In the Irish context, sectarianism¹ has become shorthand for a prejudice that has grown up between Christian denominations. The disputes within different Christian traditions have been conflated with the general cultural animus between the 'two tribes' of this island: Catholics and Protestants. This socio-theological interface is 'sectarianism'. This is indeed a bad thing. The common misconception held by those from outside Ireland is that the Troubles were theologically motivated. This view is espoused widely, whether in Dawkins' *God Delusion* or in the infamous episode of the 1990's children's cartoon *Captain Planet* or in conversations practically everyone has had with earnest foreigners we meet on our travels.

With the rise in the perceived threat of Islamic terrorist groups in the aftermath of 9/11, fundamentalism has been the topic of much popular conversation in the last ten years. It can be technically understood as a “radical reconstruction and redeployment of a tradition for contemporary purposes.”² It can in theory be applied to any ideology from obvious religious forms right through to economic fundamentalism. It owes its origins as a term to the conservative Protestantism of 1920s America but it applies today to a range of innovations on traditionalist movements across politics, religion and economics on all continents. Each one of these movements arose out of a particular context and is a reaction to the specifics of that context. It can be very difficult to create a general species of fundamentalism, each particular movement has its own unique characteristics. While it may be more correct to refer to a group as a “belligerent neoradical protorevolutionary extremist conservatism”³ instead of as “a bunch of fundies”, the term is used very loosely today, in an exclusively negative sense, to indicate specifically religious practices and beliefs that are considered excessive.

The last two generations of Irish history, both in the Republic and in the North, would leave most of us with the unexamined assumption that we need less sectarianism and less fundamentalism and that one contribution theological studies can make to peace on our island is to reduce these forces.

1. The operating assumption follows the categorization of “sect” in the work of Ernst Troeltsch such as (1931) *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

2. S. Bruce (2008) , *Fundamentalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 9.

3. M.E. Marty (1992) “Fundamentals of Fundamentalism” in *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, p. 17.

In this paper I intend to problematize the terms sectarian and fundamentalist and by reading them through the lens of early Christian practice (specifically 1 Peter), argue that a deeper sectarianism and fundamentalism offers a promising framework by which to approach ecclesiology in Ireland in the coming decades. In other words, a church that is well adjusted to be able to worship and witness to their beliefs with integrity while making a positive contribution to the pluralistic and increasingly secular State we live in, will need to be both sectarian and fundamentalist.

A Portrait Of A Positive Sectarianism

Alasdair McIntyre has famously argued that the task of virtue formation in modern societies must inevitably fall to small communities of people who share a common narrative and view of the world. Or as he puts it, “it is out of the debates, conflicts, and enquiry of socially embodied, historically contingent traditions that contentions regarding practical rationality and justice are advanced, modified, abandoned, or replaced... there is no other way to engage in the formulation, elaboration, rational justification, and criticisms of accounts of practical rationality and justice except from within some one particular tradition.”⁴ These virtue-forming communities operate self-consciously in a fashion that is distinct from the wider world and the prevailing trends of modernity. It is in this sense that a Christian community can helpfully aim at being sectarian.

Thus, the sectarianism that I propose has nothing to do with the common Irish understanding of a prejudice between Christian denominations and transcends the naive understanding of sect as a group that retreats “into the private world of the Church and into personal spirituality.”⁵

The Christian traditions have had a significant impact on shaping the intellectual world in which we live and the values of the contemporary liberal west. Yet the claims made by any specific Christian tradition are radically divergent from the prevailing philosophies. In a Christendom context where the churches played a central and explicit role in forming and shaping the values of society, the shared language of our culture was common to everyone. But beneath this shared vocabulary about “sin” and “sacrifice”, “heaven” and “hell”, different traditions intended to communicate radically different ideas. Our shared language actually served to hinder our communication. A thin veil of religiosity spanned our public discourse but in the semantic gaps between that opened up inside notionally Christian views of the good life, ill feeling and malice had plenty of space to thrive.

In Ireland, this worked out so that Christian traditions who could pronounce the Creed together descended into acrimonious disputes that expressed themselves in what we might loosely call “sectarian conflict.” One solution to this situation is in fact this

4. A. MacIntyre (1988), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London: Duckworth, p. 350.

5. N. Biggar (2000), ‘Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?’ in M. Thiesen and S. Wells (eds.), *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation With the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, pp. 141-160, p. 149.

positive, renewed sectarianism, where the term is understood more tightly. It is not simply the case in contemporary Ireland that the Christian claim does not have universal support but rather that in some of its aspects it is actually problematic for the prevailing culture. This post-Christendom context only reveals what was previously true but hidden- there is no universal agreement when public discourse of any kind turns to Christian theological categories. An appropriate, healthy and perhaps even essential response from specific Christian traditions (who do not even naturally share completely common languages with each other) is to advance a sectarian self understanding.

The Irish churches do not exist to advance social justice in contemporary Ireland. They exist to be the church. Only by pursuing this vocation can they hope to have a meaningful contribution to justice in wider society. In the words of Stanley Hauerwas, “What makes the church the church is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable Kingdom in the world. As such, the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic.”⁶ Increasingly, Irish society will feel no need to consult with ecclesial bodies on any questions of social morality or judicial development. Cultural developments will happen without reference to the church or to the influence of the Christian tradition in Ireland. As Christians seek to understand what their role is in this changed landscape, it is my contention that fruitfulness will follow not from forcing ourselves into the public square, nor by totally withdrawing from the public square, but by self-consciously understanding ourselves as distinct from but engaged with the public square. A sectarianism understood as a single minded focus on being the church, the servant community of Jesus, before we consider any civic senses in which we exist.

In Defence of Lost Causes: Fundamentalism

Too often, the mere mention of fundamentalism “silences intelligible debate, thereby guaranteeing the hegemony of liberal secularism, dismissing the religious critique of secularism as its obverse: intolerant madness.”⁷ When proposing that we need more fundamentalist Christian communities, I do not for a moment wish to propose that Ireland needs more people who “believe that the world can be transformed by spectacular acts of terror.”⁸ As against conflating fundamentalism with terror and with religious violence I want to propose that the word can be used viably to describe peace-enshrining communities who are single minded and radical in re-interpreting the ancient Christian tradition in reaction to the modern context in which they find themselves.

The problem with what we call Christian fundamentalism in Ireland is that it is not fundamentalist enough. As Zizek puts it, “Christian fundamentalists are a disgrace to true fundamentalism.”⁹ These are pseudo-fundamentalists “who are already

6. S. Hauerwas (1983), *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, p. 99.

7. M. Pound (2008), *Zizek: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 2.

8. J. Gray (2003), *Al Qaeda and What it Means To Be Modern*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 118.

9. S. Zizek (2009), ‘Dialectical Clarity Versus The Misty Conceit Of Paradox’ in S. Zizek and J. Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox Or Dialectic?*, Cambridge: MIT Press, p. 272.

'modernists'." ¹⁰ Sold out to the assumption that the church's role is in a large part to shape public morality and policy, the fundamentalist project became a hijacked religion for political purposes. Hence, the theologically (and indeed socially!) troubling but nonetheless common occurrence of Christian ministers elected to office or Christian Bishops being consulted before legislation is drafted.

Even in the origins of the movement, Christian Fundamentalism did not mean pure Biblicism. BB Warfield, a chief contributor to *The Fundamentals* ¹¹ and a father of the movement through his role within the Princeton school, had a sophisticated view of the creation accounts of Genesis and called himself a "Darwinian of the purest water."¹²

Thus, there is space for a fundamentalism that is not "not bothered by the secret enjoyment of Others"¹³ or the political, social or cultural agendas of others. Fundamentalism would thus serve as the authority structure for the sectarian church - the authority by which the community decides to act out their vocation is determined by a single minded focus on the Scriptures. Models of how this interpretation can be conducted in today's world without slipping into anachronistic fantasy are common. One might draw on Kevin Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach to Christian theology¹⁴ or N.T. Wright's improvised drama model or on many other parallel efforts that have been made to put flesh and bones on what the authority of Scripture actually means for communities. Ecclesial communities that radically seek to ground their method and message in the Scriptures as a whole (informed by the whole text and by a wider reading of Christian interpretation through history) will be empowered to engage openly with the society around them, avoiding the traps of isolationism or triumphalism that have been traditionally associated with Irish sectarianism and fundamentalism.

In fact, these understandings of sectarian and fundamentalist interact with each other to undergird and correct each other. The sectarian community would be challenged against the temptation of slipping into isolationism or a sense of superiority by radically informing their practice from the Scriptures. The fundamentalist community would be challenged against the temptation of letting their purpose slip into political or cultural hegemonic goals by constantly checking their desires against the primary calling to be church.

Sectarian Fundamentalism: A Soft Difference

An example of such a sectarian fundamentalist community can actually be found, appropriately enough, in the Scriptures. In an influential paper entitled "Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter," ¹⁵ Miroslav Volf argues for what he calls the "soft difference" ecclesiology expressed in that letter. The guiding metaphor that Peter offers us for the Christian

10. S. Zizek (2002), *Welcome To The Desert Of The Real*. London: Verso, p. 38.

11. For example, his article (1910), 'The Deity of Christ' in A.C. Dixon (ed.), *The Fundamentals* Volume I. Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, pp. 21-29.

12. D.N. Livingstone (1984), *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 115.

13. S. Zizek (2002), *Revolution at the Gates: Zizek on Lenin*. London: Verso, p. 174.

14. K. Vanhoozer (2005), *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

15. M. Volf (1994), 'Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter'. *Ex Auditu*, 10, 15-31.

relationship to the wider culture is aliens (paroikos and parepidemos). The distance to the wider culture that is experienced by the alien in the communities Peter is writing to is not the distance of the immigrant into the culture. Rather the Christians being addressed are “the insiders who have diverted from their culture by being born again.”¹⁶ Christians are “by definition those who are not what they used to be.”¹⁷ Their religious identity is one of distance from the world but this distance is “always social distance.”¹⁸

The nature of the soft difference that conversion into the Christian community consisted of was not an individualist journey, a spiritual awakening experienced by a solitary soul. Instead, Volf describes this Petrine community as a kind of communal fundamentalism. The Biblical narrative of salvation becomes normative for the life of these diverted insiders who enter into the sect, this community that then establishes their distant-identity to the wider society through baptism. The connection “between new birth and baptism is undeniable”¹⁹ in 1 Peter. Volf points out quite plainly, “no one can baptize himself or herself, everyone must be baptized by another person into a given Christian community.”²⁰ 1 Peter strongly emphasizes the “walk” (anastrophe) of the Christian life which is an “ecclesial way of being that is distinct from the way of being of the society at large.”²¹

Conclusion

For 1 Peter, in new birth the Christian is no longer a stranger to themselves and in that discovery they are drawn near to the stranger in their midst. Although 1 Peter “does not envisage changing social structures, Christians themselves have a mission in the world.”²² The “call to follow the crucified Messiah was, in the long run, much more effective in changing the unjust political, economic and familial structures than direct exhortations to revolutionize them would ever have been.”²³

Calls for sectarian communities might lead to fears about Christian slipping into a withdrawal from the wider world. This certainly has been seen in Irish Christianity. Yet looking again to 1 Peter as our guide, if it is true that the purpose of the church as a community is to “proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9), then the self-conscious distance that the church cultivates cannot descend into isolationism²⁴. As Volf puts it, “Without distances, churches can only give speeches that others have written for them and only go places where others lead them. To make a difference, one must be different.”²⁵

1 Peter is an appropriate place for a sectarian fundamentalist Christian community to go to find out what Christian life in a non-Christian environment looks like. There was certainty in the message that had convinced them and while they always were ready to make a defence to anyone who demanded from them an account of the hope that

is in them; they sought to do it in gentleness and respect. There was no covert totalitarian intention. The alternative way of life was shaped by the certain belief that they “were ransomed from your futile ways inherited from your ancestors” (1 Pet. 1:18). Hence, the call to ethical living in 1 Peter is not “Do not be as the neighbour/other/enemy/stranger is!” but “Do not be as you were!” Ireland needs more communities that embody this sentiment. In a pluralistic Ireland, where competing value systems “do not form tight and comprehensive systems,”²⁶ Christian communities who hold such a humble, soft difference, will be equipped to be faithful witnesses to the message they have encountered and (because of that) contributors to peace in Ireland. This soft difference is born out of the sectarianism of being “diverted insiders” who are fundamentalist about their experience of being recipients of redemption by the precious blood of Christ, the unblemished lamb. (1 Pet. 1:19) Sectarian communities thus understood are compelled to engage, but have the epistemic and linguistic distance to allow for meaningful engagements. Fundamentalist communities thus understood are certain about the message they proclaim but that gives them no basis to dominate or overpower the other. What Ireland needs is more sectarian fundamentalists. It is such communities that will end up making the most significant contribution to peace in Ireland.

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22. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

24. “The tight evangelical subculture [of Northern Ireland] has produced an injurious isolationism in the movement here.” G. Jordan (2001), *Not Of This World: Evangelical Protestant in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, p. 92-93.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

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Great Communities
Artist: Jayne McConkey

Can't we all just get along?

The Value of Interdenominational Theological Education

By Abigail L. Sines

As an undergraduate I would pass on my way from my home to classes a large grey stone building surrounded by a high stone wall. It was the Grand Seminaire, the seminary for the training of priests for the archdiocese of Montreal. On the green between the building and the stone wall, a statue of Mary could be glimpsed by the passerby through the open gate... It was the world of the Rosary, the Sacred Heart, devotion to saints, indulgences. It was everything that I was not (Lochhead 1988: 67).

Thus David Lochhead, a Canadian minister, describes his early exposure to Catholicism. His understanding of what took place behind that stone wall began to change several years later after becoming involved in dialogue with Roman Catholics. And so a much changed David Lochhead, long-time practitioner in both Protestant-Catholic and Buddhist-Christian dialogue, reflects back on how differently he now understands the division that stone wall represents. Lochhead writes:

...I found myself staying in that grey stone building and looking at the statue of Mary and the high stone wall, this time from the other side...I experience this world not as strange and foreign, but as part of myself. Staying in that building is, for me, like visiting a relative. The furniture of that world is not mine. It reflects neither my beliefs, my tastes, nor my story. But it is nevertheless part of my world. It reflects stories that have been shared with me by people I have come to regard as part of my family (67).

The image that Lochhead suggests, a change in perspective from 'outside' the walls to 'inside' is a powerful one. In his journey this transition was initiated by events following his ministerial training, as part of participation in a bilateral committee in the 1960s. He describes the process as 'integration' that extends beyond the head to the 'guts': genuine understanding and acceptance of a different belief or tradition has real implications for life and practice; it is not only a matter of theories or ideas that undergo change (67).

Peaceful Walls

My experience of theological education has been interdenominational and evangelical, just over two years at Belfast Bible College. In this time I have had much wider exposure to the wondrous variety to be found within body of Christ than I had ever before given much thought to. In fact I came to this place quite ignorant of the

doctrinal roots of many of the beliefs that I took as given. Encountering peers from across the denominational spectrum, Elim, Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican and even disillusioned post-modern emergents, has prompted me to confront my beliefs and assumptions in a conscious way as I find that other people come to the table with quite different assumptions which are for them just as normative as mine are to me. And who would have guessed that I would be introduced to the Rule of Benedict in a Spirituality class and find it so utterly fascinating? Who would have guessed that an annual personal retreat to a Benedictine monastery would become for me a staple of my spiritual existence? I certainly never imagined it. Speaking only from the position of my own very limited experience I have found this process of being challenged on my assumptions to be of great value spiritually and intellectually. I believe that such challenge is invaluable for anyone training for Christian ministry¹ and should be a conscious part of the curriculum. It seems that this is of the highest level of importance in the context of Ireland where Christianity has been enlisted in the service of sectarian battles.

Having said all this I do not underestimate the walls that persist even in a diverse environment such as Belfast Bible College. Evangelicals are quite skilled at guarding the walls of orthodoxy. Some issues, like the matter of women in ordained ministry, persist as battlefields for polite skirmishes among fellow students year in and year out. Perhaps it's a topic best avoided...but then how can we avoid it...but then... The conversation will happen, in a class, in the student hostel, over coffee, and it's likely to be awkward, possibly heated. But if you know you still have to be in class with that person, or serve beside that person on lunch duty tomorrow, or (worse yet!) serve with that person on the same worship team next week, you will have that conversation in a different way. We survey our walls. We measure them, check their integrity. In the process of all the conversations we find that we are prepared to abandon some walls. Others we're still convinced that we need to hang on to, by tooth and nail if necessary.

Hermeneutics of Diversity

Dr. Graham Cheesman, former principal of Belfast Bible College and a theological educator with over 20 years of teaching experience, suggests that one of the merits of interdenominational theological education lies in what it does for our hermeneutics. Following Gadamer, Cheesman observes that 'what goes on in front of the text is often more determinative of meaning extracted than what goes on behind the text'.² Hence

...if we limit the hermeneutical community (the people reading the Word together) to a particular cultural or ecclesiastical tradition, then we limit our understanding of the Word to what we can see from our particular view.³

1. I refer here to Christian ministry in the broadest sense. It includes both ordained and non-ordained vocational ministry. This may also refer to those who train in order to engage as theological educators or those who work with ideas as theologians and scholars, all necessary vocations for the health, growth and maturity of the body. It may equally refer to those whose education takes place in parallel with or leads them back to work 'in the world' to more fully engage in the whole of life lived as service to God, regardless of what specific role or employment they pursue.

2. Graham Cheesman, Personal communication, 20 April 2010.

3. Graham Cheesman, Personal communication, 20 April 2010.

Others in theological education have made similar observations on how 'homogeneity within seminary communities breeds intellectual myopia and tends to perpetuate a narrow perspective that reflects the dominant culture and worldview on campus' (Calian 2002: 65). Interdenominational theological education has at least the potential to create important opportunities to 'jump the wall', to experience something of another perspective on the journey of integrative practice that Lochhead describes. If ministers-in-training of different denominations could 'train together, discover each other and learn to respect and work with each other while at college, we would go a long way to defeat the evil of division amongst God's people and its accompanying less than Christian attitudes'.⁴

Where shall I go from your Spirit?

Interdenominational theological education can contribute to the work of God's Spirit in a special way because the diversity of the theological community is a constant witness to the multi-faceted, dynamic and unceasing work of God's Spirit in the world. God is universally present and active in the world and God's Spirit is the life-breath of the imago Dei in every human being (Yong 2003: 46-47). Clark Pinnock, in developing his theology of the Holy Spirit, asserts that it is the Spirit of God who leads the way in ecumenical methods of doing theology that celebrate variety, investigate the 'logic and grammar' of diverse traditions and is enriched as the strengths and weaknesses of each compliment each other (1996, 238). Christ's work breaks down walls of hostility and enables reconciliation because he himself is our peace and his work is the ontological sufficiency of God reconciling the world to himself (Eph. 2:14-15; 2 Cor. 5:19). The church has received the Spirit, the Father's gift, who helps us, reminds us and teaches us all things (Jn. 15:26). The Christian family is so often in need of reminding of Jesus' earnest prayer for the unity of his followers in the pattern of the oneness of the Father and the Son (Jn. 17:11). The unity and reconciliation spoken of here follows the model of the Triune God: 'unity in diversity, not a unity of sameness' and most certainly not a 'lifeless uniformity' (Pinnock 1996, 245).

The exemplary event of the Spirit, the outpouring at Pentecost, is a major event in the reconciling work of God. It is a reversal of the division of language at Babel not because human languages were reunited to become one again. Instead, when the Spirit comes 'all understand each other not because one language is restored or a new all-encompassing meta-language is designed but because each hears his or her own language being spoken' (Volf 1996, 228). A theologically diverse learning environment allows me to become acquainted with the Spirit's work in the lives of friends of other traditions and challenges assumptions that I have made about those traditions. As I learn to discern the Spirit of God at work in unexpected ways I must question the boundaries I have placed on God, my own provincialism and narrow-mindedness. I believe this education in the diversity of the Spirit's work is important for any

minister-in-training (presumably most who are engaged in theological education are on a pathway towards vocational ministry). Students formed in this environment can take that perspective into their future work and bring it to bear as they minister among the mothers, fathers, young people, plumbers, police officers, civil servants, bus drivers and business people of Ireland that make up their congregations.

Reaching Across the Divide

Am I suggesting here the end of denominational training? Perhaps I am too much of a realist to see that future. At any rate I do not view denominations or denominational training as the primary problem, rather denominationalism is the problem we must confront. As I have suggested above difference is not the problem for Christian unity so much as hostility and competition (Pinnock 1996, 245). Boundaries as such are not an inherent evil, 'boundaries are part of the creative process of differentiation', as in the example of the physical creation of the universe (Volf 1996, 67). One of the most basic and most destructive of sins is what Volf describes as exclusion because it contravenes God's divine initiative of both separating and binding in the created world. Exclusionary behaviour is 'taking oneself out of the pattern of interdependence and placing oneself in a position of sovereign independence' (67). Exclusion also identifies attempts at 'erasure of separation, not recognizing the other as someone who in his or her otherness belongs to the pattern of interdependence'(67). God has given us to each other, differences and all, as gifts. The rich heritage of diverse denominations and traditions is the possession of the whole body of Christ. Theological education, even in a denominational context, can present opportunities for students to draw on those resources and journey towards an 'integrative' spiritual practice.

If denominational training is not a thing of the past there is surely space for an intentional interdenominational component in such theological education. What about church history classes co-taught by faculty from different backgrounds? What about having speakers from different denominations in to speak at community devotional/worship gatherings? What about attending different types of worship services together and discussing the theological differences that are expressed through the choices made about corporate worship? What about joint community service projects? What about joint exposure visits to ecumenical communities such as Corrymeela or the Charis Community in Belfast? What about requiring candidates for ordination to complete one semester of their studies, or at least one course module, at another denominational or interdenominational institution? No doubt all of these possibilities would present some logistical challenges, not least of which might be adhering to the requirements a denominational institution has in terms of course work. The end goal of a more unified, more Christ-like body is well worth the effort to think creatively.

Ireland is blessed with a profound and deep Christian spiritual heritage. This is a resource for all the people of Ireland. Ireland has also been plagued by sectarian conflict more directed towards the preservation of territorial claims than the proclamation of the good news, peace and liberation. Ruth Patterson of Restoration Ministries observes that all is not peaceful in Ireland despite years of working through a peace process:

...in our tentative peace, the anger, frustration and boredom, allied with the conditioning of centuries to react in a particular way...lie very close to the surface...Encircling and pervading all of this is the all-embracing virus of sectarianism...The poison remains within the system (2003, 19).

Traditional sectarianism is merely one continuing worry that harasses society alongside new challenges of racism and bigotry that present themselves in an increasingly religiously and culturally diverse Ireland.⁵ Theological education can and should contribute in a greater degree to peace in this place. This enterprise demands the formation of theological students so that they may be able to minister as the priests, pastors, elders, bishops and church workers of tomorrow with both fidelity to their own traditions and generous, open, ecumenical hearts. How can we do our theology together so that we're inside each other's walls, rather than outside looking in or, even worse, outside without the interest to have a look or to know the people who inhabit that other space? While we may not achieve perfect peace, how can we learn to be peaceable through intentional relationships with people who are different? These are important questions that theological institutions should consider as priorities alongside their own particular denominational mission statements.

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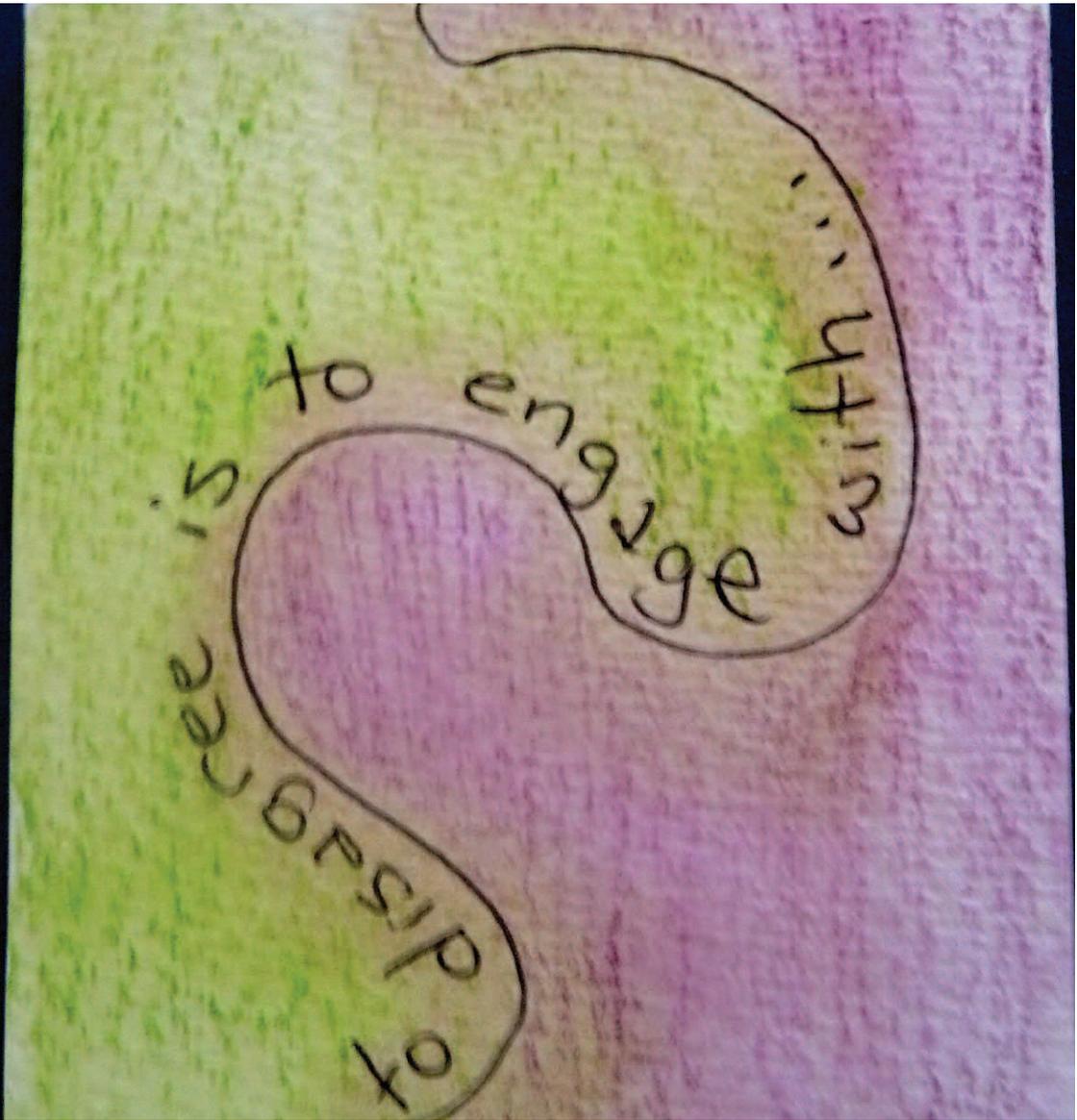
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To Disagree
Artist: Jayne McConkey

Catholic Identity-How can Irish Catholics define themselves in light of the changing views of the Catholic Church?

Máire Byrne

One of the most important things I learned from my involvement with this Irish Peace Centre's project, is that all people on the island of Ireland have differing views on what constitutes "peace" and what this "peace" is applicable to in their lives. Even though I grew up in a border town and therefore a familiarity with the the violent history and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland, it is no longer the most vital context for peace in my life and the life of my peers. Recent events in the Republic of Ireland involving child abuse and subsequent alleged and proven "cover ups" by members of the Catholic clergy, mean that my idea of "peace" is primarily associated with Irish Catholics who have been affected by these events becoming at peace with themselves and their Catholic identity. Therefore, to reconstruct the question posed: Do theological studies make a tangible and practical contribution to the inner peace of Irish Catholics on the island of Ireland?

In a recent article in "The Irish Times,"¹ Kathy Sheridan begins to address the more frequently occurring idea in Irish culture, that there may come to be a time in Irish society where the Catholic Church does not exist, or at least does not possess the power and influence over society that it once had. While Sheridan's article attempts to address the issue that had been bubbling under the surface of the reactions and debate over the position of the Catholic Church in Irish Society since the release of the Murphy and Ryan Reports,² it focuses on the idea of "Church" as the clergy and religious orders. It refers to the ordained priests, brothers and nuns, and questions, "what if they all walked away?" The idea that the Irish Catholic Church could be made up of more than the hierarchy and those who are ordained and in religious orders is not addressed, and this is becoming an area that requires more focus. There appears to be no information, anecdotally or officially of clergy or religious "walking away" from the Catholic Church but so far, on the website www.countmeout.ie, (a website set up in July 2009 providing information and advocacy for those who wish to "defect" from the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland), 10574 people³ have completed a "Declaration of Defection."⁴ This is a significant increase since "The Irish Times" article in January on the site, which reported that 6007⁵ have submitted the declaration.

1. Kathy Sheridan, "Ireland without the Church", The Irish Times - Saturday, April 3, 2010. <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2010/04/03/1224267596017.html>.

2. For the Murphy Report into Child abuse in the Dublin Diocese see <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB09000504> and for the Ryan Report from the Commission to Report into Child Abuse see <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/index.html>

3. <http://www.countmeout.ie/> Accessed 6th July 2010

4. A formal act of Defection (or "Actus formalis defectionis ab Ecclesia Catholica" in the original Latin) is a church document that registers a person's wish to defect from the Roman Catholic Church. This instrument of defection was referenced in Canons 1086 §1, 1117 and 1124 of the Code of Canon Law 1983 but what the act constitutes was only defined in a papal edict of March 13th 2006.

In tandem with this deliberate moving away from the Catholic Church and its teachings, there is the less documented phenomenon, whereby Irish Catholics are reassessing the role the Church and the leaders of the Church play in their lives. Some small and public examples of this are parents who have requested that Cardinal Brady not officiate at their children's confirmation⁶ as well as those who are reconsidering sending their children to a school with a solely Catholic ethos. What does the future hold therefore for the lay people of the Catholic Church and indeed for all Irish citizens if Catholicism has begun to take a lesser role in our society? Will this have an effect on how Irish people identify themselves or how we conduct ourselves culturally and socially?

In an academic sense even though I have studied theology formally for ten years, I have not been given the tools through this education to become "at peace" with my Catholic identity. This is simply because Catholicism does not have to set itself in opposition to another religion or faith and therefore only defines itself from the inside, or from what it perceives itself as being. Theological studies follow this format- the language of theology is for use among ones peer group, not among a wider cultural or religious influence. I have learned through my interactions with other theologians that I have never considered how much the "culture of Catholicism" has pervaded my life. I would previously have considered myself a cradle Catholic, educated in Catholic schools and universities. I have a strong faith but I consider this my own faith, I have no wish to share my opinions on religion or faith with anyone unless they initiate the process. I did not realize that so much of what I perceive as normal is actually quite strange to people of other Christian denominations and other faiths, for example the sacrament of Confirmation and the process of taking a new "name" for your confirmation. Trying to explain these practices becomes a circular issue, as I just did not possess the language to explain something that I had only ever had to engage with within my own context, the context of being Irish and being Catholic.

Outside of academia, living with a Californian for a few years alerted me to even more peculiarities of the Irish identity that are directly associated with our Catholic background. My housemate asked questions on an almost weekly basis, why do some people hit their heads when they pass a Church or graveyard? Why do the church bells ring so much- is someone dead? Why is it on the radio and the TV? Does everyone know what that is and is that why do they not say what you are meant to do? Why the big party after Confirmation and Communion? First Holy Communion brought its own problems- the white dresses and boys dressed as grooms. The whole idea of Lent when everyone gives up smoking and chocolate, but no one seems to pray or go to Mass. Since being asked these questions, I have not been able to listen to the news in the morning without paying close attention to the amount of times the newsreader says "God Bless" or "with the help of God," strange and alien concepts to a Californian.

Catholicism is as part of “brand Ireland” as consumption of alcohol is. Irish citizens are not comfortable with such a close association with Catholicism, as we do not think it covers all of our identity or accurately describes every person. Simply put, there is more to being Irish than being a Catholic.

With the shift in position of the Church in Irish society, it is important that we not speedily move to term the movement as the “secularization” of our society, a buzzword that has become synonymous with the idea that people jump ship from religion and become entirely irreligious. Rather we should look at what is happening in Ireland as a cultural shift, not a dismissal of religion, but a redefinition of a person or community in light of a momentous and changing event. This shift does not have to be seen as something negative, or viewed by leaders of the Church as abandonment. To reassess your role in a society or institution is healthy and in the long term will contribute to the growth and development of both the person and the group.

How then are Irish people to begin to redefine themselves or even to come to “peace” with their identity? One phrase that is often used to describe Catholics who no longer doggedly adhere to the rules and regulations of the Catholic Church is “à la carte Catholic.” This is usually seen in a negative sense, to describe someone who is no longer orthodox, but does not want to remove themselves from the community of the Church altogether, a sort of “have your cake and eat it” approach to religion and faith. This idea does not adequately describe the new type of Catholic who is emerging in light of the “scandals” of the Church. These people do not see themselves as being fulfilled by the Church, because either they do not connect with it sufficiently or the paths are not in place for them to engage sufficiently. Catholics in Ireland are now not only choosing between different beliefs, practices and teachings of their own church but also look at other religions and their beliefs and practices and mix and match according to their own tastes and preferences, particularly in relation to living a spiritual and good life. In time, these practices will be assimilated into Catholicism and in the same way as Irish secular culture now embraces new food, music, and culture, our Irish Catholic religion may be enhanced by this globalization of religion. The idea that we can be open to other religions will mean that we are more open to appreciating the beliefs and cultural practices of the Protestant community. The idea of creativity in terms of Catholicism is raised here-not just in terms of practices and beliefs being influenced by religion, but by Catholics who creatively seek to learn about, engage with and challenge the teachings of the Church. This process is already part of the American Catholic culture, and in a study of American Catholics a decade ago, it was observed that many Catholics go beyond seeing their Catholic identity as part of their cultural heritage and are actively engaged in challenging some of the Church's teachings.⁷ These Catholics have a strong identification with being Catholic but they do not see themselves as culturally Catholic and as such are anxious and

7. Michele Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

willing to explore alternative ways of being moral and spiritual. This leaves them open to being able to embrace philosophies and ideals that at first may seem contradictory to Catholic teaching (a good example here being feminism).

Any change in the way Irish Catholics see and understand themselves as Catholics, in terms of how they identify with the institution of the Church and with each other needs to be appreciated as a long-term process of change and renewal and a search for a language and process to formalize our own identity. It is not a straight path and not one where the way forward can clearly be seen. This is the only way that Irish Catholics can find peace within themselves.

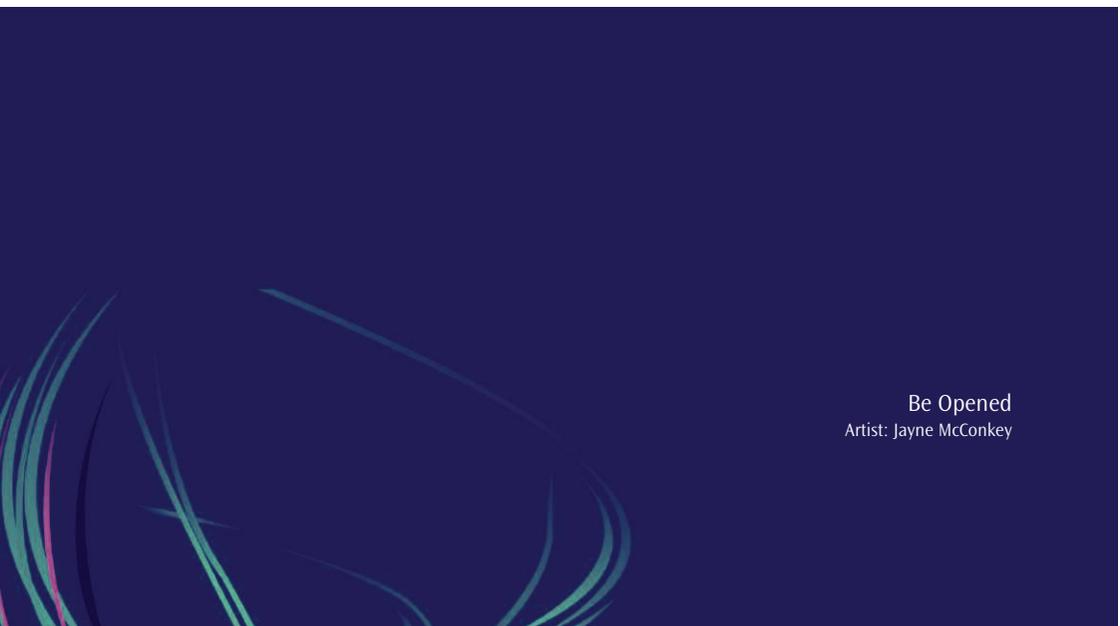
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Be Opened
Artist: Jayne McConkey

Opening Spaces for Theologies of Peace

by Sharon Verwoerd

Introduction

There exists a rich field of theology that offers both spiritual formation and practises for nurturing peace at intrapersonal (within oneself), interpersonal and community levels. If we can open spaces in the rhythms of life in Christian communities to engage meaningfully with these traditions, a tangible and practical contribution to peace on the island of Ireland could grow. This paper seeks to explore why teachings which have informed ecumenical and peace initiatives elsewhere have been resisted here and to offer a way forward. As an 'outsider', I offer a point of view based on my limited experience and understanding of people and organisations here in Northern Ireland with the hope that 'fresh eyes' may encourage conversation about the role of theologies of peace in our faith traditions. Whilst I draw wider conclusions, the following reflections are restricted to my understanding of the peace movement and the Roman Catholic Church in Northern Ireland.

The first part of the paper briefly summarises some of the theological traditions that nurture peace in other parts of the world. There is no question that peace and justice are central to the mission of the Christian Church¹. However, in Northern Ireland the trend has been to emphasise differences in dogma and practises in order to maintain identity boundaries at the expense of engagement with that part of the Christian mission which calls us to include and understand the 'other.'

The second part of this paper points to some of the reasons why leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Northern Ireland have not engaged people in theologies of peace. These include: deeply embedded Irish-Nationalist-Catholic narratives of oppression and victimhood that continue to influence perceptions of community relations today; the tightening of identity boundaries and control mechanisms as a response to perceived threat; and the loss of complexity in understanding of themselves and others.

The paper concludes by offering a way forward through creating spaces in the rhythms of parish and community life for shared theological reflection and action. In doing this, we have an opportunity to challenge the dominant narratives and ongoing lines of division. An appreciation of the complexity of the human experience can then emerge, offering hope of a tangible and practical contribution to peace.

PART I: Theologies of peace and the local church.

The field of theological studies related to peace is broad and is largely ecumenical in nature. It would be impossible to offer a comprehensive summary of the whole field here. However, it might be helpful to outline some of the main approaches. Since peace is a central theme in the Bible, theologies of peace have grown naturally out of Scriptural studies, forming a point of connection across denominations. Reflections upon particular verses have influenced me at different times. Writers like Walter Wink inform many peace movements around the world. He (and others) re-examines the text with a social justice and nonviolence lens, offering an alternative interpretation of Jesus' teachings. Other traditions are rooted in Sacramental Theology, linking the grace freely offered to all in the sacraments to the task of offering God's love freely to all. The Sacrament of Reconciliation (or Penance) is described as an encounter with the forgiving, loving God, through which we grow in our own ability to offer these to others (Hardon, 2003). Closely linked to this tradition are the writings of some mystics and contemplatives like Thomas Merton, Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart and St Francis, for whom peace comes from a deep connection to God. In addition, a significant body of papal letters and speeches, rooted in social teaching and Scripture, have been dedicated to calling for holistic peace and justice over the past three decades².

My experience has been that peace movements founded in theology and spiritual practise draw us into a deeper understanding of the full human experience of conflict. In a way that secular groups cannot, they nurture peace at intrapersonal as well as interpersonal and community levels. Theologies of peace are a response to the real issues of conflict and injustice faced by people everywhere, so they are inherently practical and accessible. People of faith working for peace offer practical insight into how to live out these theologies of peace³. There are hundreds of Christian (and inter-faith) organisations dedicated to peace that are rooted in faith and informed by theological traditions like those above. Most of these groups are open to anyone and, importantly, support members through workshops, gatherings and newsletters which include formation in theology and spirituality, community and opportunities to get involved.

2. Pope Paul VI and John Paul II were both very vocal on the theme of peace, even whilst Northern Ireland was embroiled in deep inter-communal conflict.

3. Lederach is well-known for his faith-centred approach to peacebuilding. He dedicates a chapter in *The Moral Imagination* to developing our understanding of vocation in the field.

Several small ecumenical and faith-based peace groups are active in Northern Ireland. Corrymeela is an excellent example of an ecumenical Christian community committed to working together for peace. However, almost all of these groups are lay-led and have been largely unsupported by leaders in the Catholic Church. Examples of good practise at local level “like ecumenical prayer groups and regional cooperation between clergy, often remain unreported and under-appreciated” (Layden, 2005). The All Children Together and Integrated Education movements, in which I have been involved for the past few years, have been another example of people of faith working for peace in an environment of suspicion and obstruction by church leaders. Supportive local clergy and lay-people were constrained by the position taken by hierarchy.⁴

Theologies of peace teach us that ignoring or condemning violence, as has been the standard practice by the Church, is counter-productive. It identifies perpetrators of violence as the problem and ignores the part we all play in perpetuating misunderstanding and sectarianism. If we engage with theologies of peace, we are drawn into a journey that includes all in exploring the interconnectedness of our spiritual, social and political lives. The challenge is to invite people into space together and to seriously engage with that part of the Christian mission which calls us to be peacemakers. This takes more courage and openness than has been displayed by our local church leaders thus far.

PART II: Conflict theories and peacebuilding

It is easy to be disappointed by the lack of leadership from churches in Northern Ireland in building peace. However, it may be more useful to consider some of the reasons for this reticence⁵ and imagine how the Christian Church (leaders and laypeople) could begin to create the space needed for engagement with theologies of peace. At least part of the complex, interconnected answers can be found in our understandings of conflict dynamics and narrative theory.

The perspective of many Catholics about the conflict in Northern Ireland has roots in their historical understandings of British control of the island of Ireland. Narrative theory suggests that shared stories powerfully establish identity and meaning for individuals and groups and form the foundations for all relationships. In a context of ongoing conflict, these narratives continually reinforce group identities and meanings for new generations (Bush & Folger, 2005). This is exemplified by young people today when they speak of traumatic events in their communities during 'the Troubles' as something they personally experienced, expressing the trauma that was felt by the community then in the present.

4. The improvement in relationships over the past few years is a welcome sign that church leaders may soon become more actively involved in cross community peace initiatives.

5. Indeed, it would be a valuable exercise if communities could reflect honestly upon this question together, forming their own answers that may lead to a change of approach.

Local Catholic narratives contain strong themes of victimhood to British oppression and of struggling for rights and self-government⁶. Stories of the abundance of food withheld from the Irish during the Famine, of unjust treatment of Catholics in Northern Ireland after partition and of oppression by the British army (and the state-maintained police force) all contribute to a sense of being under siege. These stories connect being Irish with being Catholic and perceived oppression of either one is felt to be of both. It is important to remember that people at all levels in the church are products of their own experiences and the stories in their community. Church leaders are not immune to the prejudices and fears these narratives perpetuate. They have often acted defensively, closing ranks to protect that which was not, in reality, being attacked.

The lack of official acknowledgment of - and inclusive dialogue about - the suffering experienced by so many mean that there has been little opportunity to introduce “new understandings of their situation, or redefine the nature of the conflict, the relationships among the parties or the problems they face” (Putnam, 2004: 276). That church leaders from across the community divide never united to offer a shared narrative based on a common Christian mission demonstrates the power of the narratives in forcing loyalty to the group and accentuating differences.

These Irish-Nationalist-Catholic and British-Unionist-Protestant identities have formed with precious few people or organisations able to challenge them. Church, state institutions and political groupings mostly continue to reinforce the three-part identity, positioning everyone on one or other 'side' of a divided society. There are a number of prerequisite knowledges, understandings and attitudes that must be adhered to in order to belong to each grouping. The hierarchical culture of the Roman Catholic Church tends to reinforce this control over people. Instead of opening minds to the breadth of thought which is part of the experience of Roman Catholics elsewhere, a rigid social identity is entrenched further. Catholics in Northern Ireland have lived a life characterised by striking uniformity in religious belief and practice, patterns of social interaction, educational experiences and political attitudes - and equally striking lack of interaction with people from other backgrounds. In this way, the churches contributed to sectarian misunderstandings and beliefs that God was on one or other 'side', adding denominational differences to the frame of conflict.

This tendency to draw all elements of identity together, emphasising difference to 'others', is common in contexts of chronic conflict. Complexity of understanding is often lost as beliefs and attitudes become entrenched. Dualistic thinking and simplistic explanations preclude an appreciation for a shared vision and makes it easier to dismiss the needs of others. Social identity theories suggest that shared identities are necessary to challenge the dominance of these groupings, which obstruct opportunities to imagine a common future (Hamburg & Hamburg, 2004).

6. Parallel narratives are equally powerful influences in other communities in Northern Ireland. I am restricting this section to the Catholic community because that is the one I feel more able to speak about. Many readers will be able to draw appropriate conclusions about other communities by applying the theories explained here.

Projects like shared education, health care and infrastructure provision that meet common needs can lead to new partnerships. The lesson for the churches may be that working together towards shared social goals (like care for the sick and dying, for people who are homeless, refugees, etc) and ecumenical initiatives which explore common theology could be vital in creating space for peace.

The emphasis on differences along Irish-Catholic and British-Protestant lines has also been sustained by low immigration. Small, but growing communities which do not fit into the traditional two-way thinking - like Catholics from eastern Europe and children born of immigrants who speak with Northern Irish accents - now offer the opportunity for other opinions and multiple, shared identities to form. In addition to introducing diversity in social groupings, a common purpose amongst Christians was uncovered recently in responding to the plight of one particular immigrant group facing abuse. This gives reason for hope that we can work together more and more.

Conclusion: Creating Spaces

When the question of whether theological studies contribute tangibly and practically to peace in Ireland, my initial response was that, although there has been a conspicuous absence of engagement in the past, it could make a difference. Through a process of reflecting on the theologies of peace that have formed my own understandings and the context of entrenched conflict in Northern Ireland into which churches have been drawn, I am led to conclude that opportunities can be created for the churches to draw on theology together to nurture peace actively. Here, let me briefly outline a few initial steps that the churches could take in their own communities, between communities and in the social arena.

The first steps to be taken are in the weekly practises within communities. For most adult Christians, what happens at church on the weekend forms the cornerstone of their faith. However, homilies rarely touch on theology or on common Christian teaching. The Catholic trend is for homilies to be short and related to family or parish issues. Whilst this offers encouragement for many, it amounts to a missed opportunity, since how the five minutes is spent sends a very clear message about the priorities of the Church. It is especially disappointing when local events or the assigned readings point to the need for some reflection and practical insights on the call to be peacemakers. This message has been largely missing, reinforcing the erroneous assumption that individual church-goers have nothing to do with the conflict or with peace. The opportunity remains if leaders are willing to take it up.

Another step is in communicating what is being achieved in the field of ecumenism. In this part of the world, where sectarian misunderstandings are common, the agreement being reached at higher levels must be communicated to the people. "The

people in the pews need clear signs that developments in ecumenical understanding are for real and are for all church members” (Layden, 2005). The opportunity, then, lies in creating space in community life for this significant movement in the worldwide church to be made available to everyone and to be explicitly supported by leadership.

It is vital in our context of sectarian division that churches work together in the social arena, as well as within their faith communities. There are two clear ways in which shared theological reflection could contribute to peace. The first is in joint initiatives in serving the disadvantaged and in advocating for justice for those who are socially excluded. As mentioned above, there are already hopeful signs that this is possible.

The second way that the churches could contribute to peace is in publicly exploring together opposing stories of the conflict to find commonalities. This could free people from the power that community narratives hold over them to enable them to recognise the experience of the 'other'. It will be important to acknowledge in some way the pain and trauma suffered by all. Churches could lead the way by making joint theological statements about the central Christian message of peace and reconciliation and by listening to people, acknowledging pain caused by sectarian violence and providing support for those with particular needs. Whilst our stories remain separate and opposed, and while Christians are not taking up their task to be peacemakers, peace will remain elusive. The point here is that the churches must work together to uncover and publicly acknowledge the narratives which have fed the conflict here, and to explicitly apply a theological lens to them, exploring alternative interpretations from which new ways of relating to one another may emerge. The participation of churches in reconciliation efforts around the world has added a sense of spiritual, as well as social, healing. Religious leaders have inspired many to work for peace together based on a theology of peace for their context⁷.

Theologies of peace offer us a way forward together through prayer and reflection, formation and action. In this way, we can create space for peace at all levels, from our own selves to international relationships. My prayer is that the churches - including clergy, ministers, theological students and lay-people - will engage with these theological traditions with courage and imagination to make a sustainable contribution to peace in Ireland.

7. There are many examples. The most famous is Archbishop Tutu in South Africa (although he was supported by many). Equally courageous and deeply spiritual responses have been led Bishop Carlos Belo in East Timor and the united, ecumenical group coordinated by the Catholic Archbishop of Sao Paulo in Brazil.

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creating peace

Creating Peace
Artist: Jayne McConkey

“The wolf shall live with the lamb”?: Can the Bible realistically speak to peace today?

Francis Cousins

This paper seeks to address the question: 'Can the Bible act as an aid for those who are striving to build peace today?' In the context, of the island of Ireland where the vast majority of people on the island profess to be Christian, what does the common factor of the Bible, which is the foundational text of the Christian faith, say about peace? The paper will explore some of the different representations of peace/war in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. The paper does not aim to be a last word which covers all aspects of peace and war in the Bible, but rather to raise some key issues, before discussing whether these issues have any application to building peace in contemporary Ireland. By examining briefly some texts relevant to the theme of peace and war I hope to put forward one hermeneutical model which would allow the Bible to provide a foundation on which peace may be built.

There is to a certain extent a dichotomy in parishes over the presentation of the Old and the New Testaments. In this view, the God of the Old Testament is presented almost as a caricature - someone who remains distant, yet plays a violent role. This makes people more familiar with the message of peace presented by Jesus (best captured by the invocation to “turn the other cheek” - Matt 5:39). Only a revisionist presentation of the Hebrew Scriptures would suggest that there is no violence, yet in order to critique this we need to look more closely at the texts and also, more importantly, take into consideration the fact that the texts are very much of their time. The texts emerged from a community - in this case a nation, Israel, who were surrounded by 'superpowers' in the ancient context, the Egyptians, and the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. It is necessary to read the texts in context and on their own terms, but also to understand that the Old Testament provides an important background for the reader of the New Testament and was the scriptures both of Jesus and the authors of the New Testament.

It is within this context that the Pentateuch reached its final form. Built on the foundation of God's promise to Abram, 'I will make you a great nation' (Gen 12:2)¹, the Pentateuch tells the story of the birth of the nation of Israel, which leads them into and out of slavery in Egypt, through years of wandering in the wilderness and finally to the inheritance of the Promised Land.

Beginning with the image of God as presented in the Pentateuch, we see a God who leads the people of Israel to freedom from Egyptian oppression - but also fights alongside the people against the Egyptians, in what is surely an unfair battle. While

the image of a God who seems to delight in violence is very challenging to Christians today, at a stretch we could perhaps reconcile ourselves with the fact that God fights on the side of good against evil - which may be personified by, for example, the Philistines. However, at times the God of Israel appears to go beyond that. If we take the example of the Exodus story, we see a pattern where, upon Moses requesting that Pharaoh let the people of Israel go, after an initial acceptance, the Lord hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh refuses (see Exod 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). This presents a greater challenge for the contemporary reader. In my reading of the text, not only is the Lord acting on the side of Israel, with the miraculous events of the ten plagues for example (Exodus 7-11), but he is also intervening in a controlling manner to affect how Pharaoh acts. In this reading of the story, it seems as if the people of Israel could have received their freedom without the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians and Pharaoh's army being drowned in the sea. What kind of God would promote such slaughter and in many ways cause it? The hardening of Pharaoh's heart serves to justify his punishment - and by extension the punishment of the Egyptians. Yet, Pharaoh is responsible for the hard heart, even if the Lord hardened it. That the Lord is in control of destiny does not lesson human responsibility. Humans must bear responsibility for their own actions. In terms of conflict it is not a valid excuse to say that one is acting on behalf of God.

The context in which these texts were written is also vital for their interpretation. The Exodus event is key to Jewish self-understanding as it began to define the nation of Israel, a nation which had a solid bond to their God as a result of the Lord's role in the escape from Egypt. The worldview at this time was simple, as witnessed in the Deuteronomic history, where over and over again bad deeds are punished and good deeds rewarded, on an individual, and more importantly on a national level. God is very much on the side of Israel, but this love is not quite unconditional. The good deeds of the people of Israel will be rewarded, just as their sins will be punished through loss of divine favour. This narrative structure is constantly reinforced as sins of Israel are punished before repentance leads to a return of God's favour. However, as time passed, this simplistic worldview did not stand up to scrutiny and different theologies began to emerge - as narrated, for example, in the book of Job. People began to ask 'why do bad things happen to good people?' and the book of Job offered one possible answer.

In prophetic times ideas such as social justice came to the fore (notably in the prophecy of Amos) as prophets began to speak to Israel society, especially the kings and leaders, about their conduct - in the context of how they were living out the values of Torah.

Isaiah presents some striking images of a messianic age. He speaks of a child to be born, who will be named: 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace' (Isa 9:6). This child will oversee an age where justice and righteousness reign. Moreover, this Prince of Peace will reign in an age where traditional enemies will live together in harmony, personified in memorable images such as 'the leopard shall lie down with the kid' (11:6) and 'the nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp' (11:8).

However, this was not the case of all the prophets. There is the famous citation of Ezekiel 25:17 'I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful punishments. Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I lay my vengeance on them ', as cited by Samuel L. Jackson's character, Jules Winnfield, in the film Pulp Fiction. This verse, which reports of the words of the Lord, indicates that the Lord is willing to act in a violent manner against the enemies of Israel. Thus while peace may have been entering the biblical language through Isaiah's prophecy, violence was not too far from the surface.

Thus, while there were moments when violence disappeared from the agenda, it was very much linked to many of the historical and prophetic writings in the Old Testament. The situation of the people of Israel was tenuous, surrounded as they were by warring nations. The Lord was a warrior God, who fought alongside them, helping to protect their identity as a nation, striking down their enemies and keeping them safe in the Promised Land. This was very much a pre-exilic theology, which had to be reassessed after the first great trauma of the Israeli nation - The Babylonian Exile. The people of Israel, who saw themselves as God's chosen people, had to reassess the situation as they had been removed from the Promised Land and made to live as slaves in Babylon - and moreover, the Temple, the locus of their sacrifice and central location of their religion had been destroyed.

The New Testament appears to recount a radical break from the teachings of the Hebrew Bible regarding peace. This is perhaps best summed up by Jesus' invocation to 'turn the other cheek' (Matt 5:39). This invocation is given in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus in his own words is bringing the law to fulfilment (5:17). Thus, the Torah is given a new, or enhanced, meaning. The Sermon on the Mount is also the source of the famous non-violent demand Jesus places on his disciples to turn the other cheek (Matt 5:39). This approach takes the command to love God and neighbour to its ultimate and radical conclusion. Sadly, what appears to be a pretty clearcut demand is often interpreted allegorically as 'unrealistic' and, since the early centuries, has been disregarded by most Christians.

The aim here is not to enter a role of complete passivity, as we see for example when an angry Jesus clears moneylenders from the Temple (Matt 21:12-13). Rather, Jesus, who Matthew presents as a Messiah with the power to interpret Torah anew, is presenting a way of life for his followers, following a new Torah written on the heart, a truer fulfilment of the commandment to love God and neighbour (Deut 6:4).

It is also interesting in this context to examine some of the teachings of Paul, notably in his letter to the Galatians, which was written to a divided community, who are struggling to integrate Jews and Gentiles into a community that professes Jesus as Lord. According to Paul, there are no boundaries for those who are in Christ:

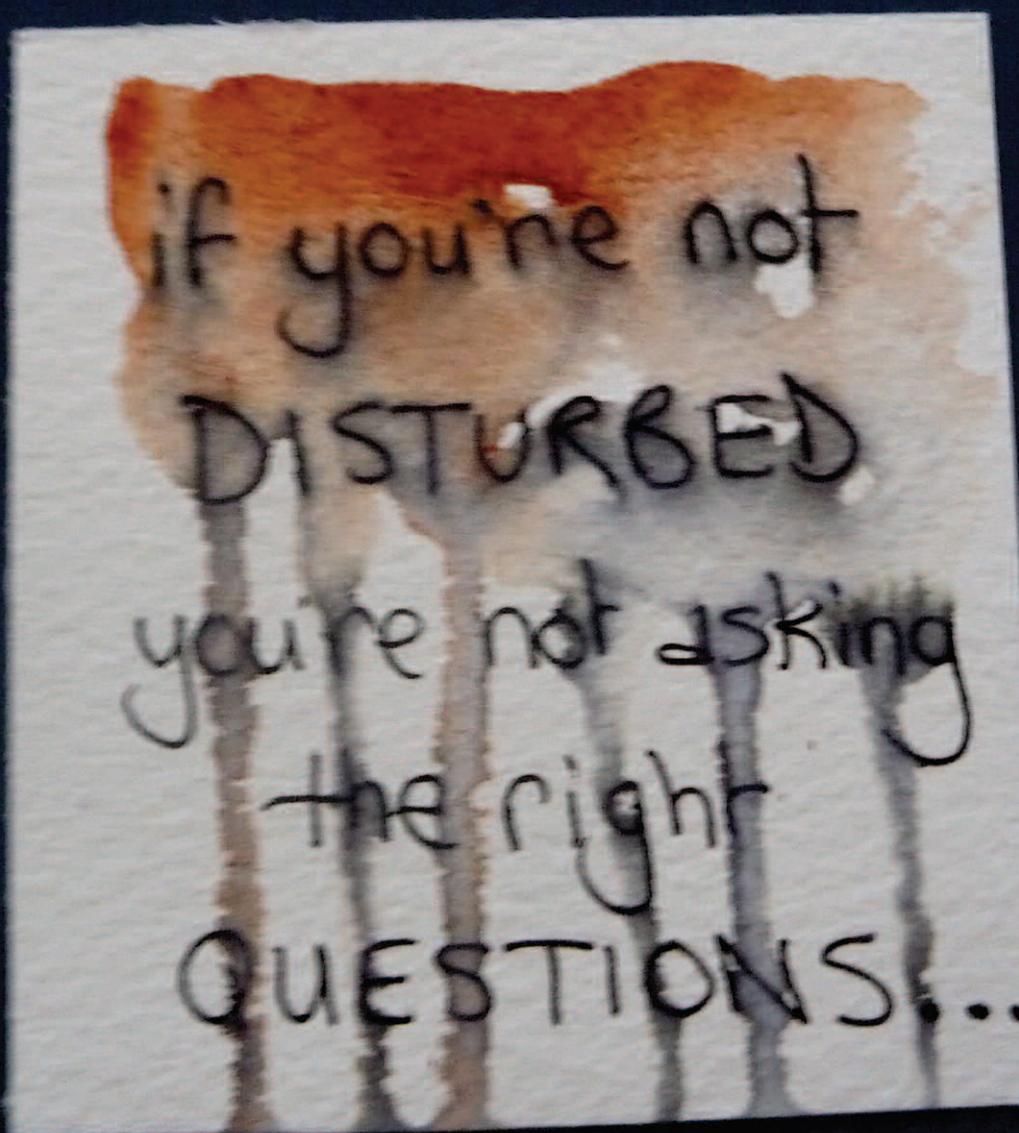
As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26-28)

Here Paul recognises that unity is key to building a true community. Rather than focus on what divides, on the differences between members of the community, Paul focuses on what unites: Christ.

It is perhaps this teaching of Paul which speaks most clearly to the situation in contemporary Ireland. Instead of focusing on what divides, Paul exhorts the Galatians to focus on what they have in common. Otherness is not something to fear, yet in reality many people in Ireland do fear those who are different, they fear otherness. We need to overcome boundaries and separation which allows communities to live in opposition. By focusing on what we have in common we can reach out to the other, welcome them and build on solid foundations of unity.

The Gospels, especially the Gospel of Luke, contain many stories of hospitality which form a thread linking the narrative. Jesus eats with sinners and tax collectors, dines with Zacchaeus, tells stories of the guests who decline to come to the Great Banquet while he dines with the Pharisees, eats his Last Supper with the disciples on the Passover and reveals himself in the Breaking of the Bread on the Road to Emmaus. Hospitality and welcome are key themes in the Gospels, inviting us to move outside of our comfort zone and to include the stranger in our midst. On the Road to Emmaus the invitation by the disciples to share a meal is a vital part of Jesus' revelation.

Can the Bible act as an aid to those who seek to build peace? The answer is yes. Peace is more than the absence of war. It is about building community and overcoming difference. According to Isaiah, the messianic era would see the wolf living with the lamb. While our efforts may not see such grandiose results, it would help break down the barriers of difference and lead to the discovery of common ground.



if you're not
DISTURBED
you're not asking
the right
QUESTIONS...

Disturbed
Artist: Jayne McConkey

Consuming Peace

David Masters

Shopping Centres

Belfast, like most of the UK's former industrial centres, is a city of shopping centres. When the regeneration of Belfast city centre was planned in the mid-1980's, shopping centres were part of the roadmap to putting an end to violence. CastleCourt shopping centre, which opened in the late 1980's, and Victoria Square shopping centre, which opened in 2008, were both built with government help. Local government officials argued that regenerating the city centre as a post-modern shopping destination with national and international brands would revitalize the city's economy, create new jobs, and accelerate the arrival of peace.

Job creation was seen as a key benefit.¹ Terrorism was directly linked to economic deprivation, which in turn was linked to unemployment. Shopping centres would create thousands of new low-skilled jobs.²

This proved a success. In the 1960s Northern Ireland had the highest unemployment rate in the United Kingdom. Yet in 1992, when the first stage of regeneration was complete, the number of jobs in Northern Ireland started growing faster than in any other UK region, and by 2008, Northern Ireland had the lowest unemployment rate of all UK regions. However, the success was tinged with some criticism. Those who most benefited from the new jobs were middle class commuters from outside Belfast rather than deprived communities within the city. The development of the city centre has been at the expense of neighbourhood renewal in Belfast's deprived urban communities.

Regenerating the city centre had a second benefit. The transformed city centre was a⁶ neutral space where Protestants and Catholics could peacefully interact. Political differences would be set aside for the sake of commercial unity and economic success. As William Neill, lecturer in Architecture at Queen's University, said in the early 1990s, the “neutral symbolism” of retail brands was “intended to create images and spaces which dilute the backward-looking symbolism of the present” and thus “induce historical amnesia.” In the commercialized and neutral space of the city centre, the historical, political and religious identities of Protestant and Catholic would be subsumed into the contemporary, apolitical, and shared identity of the consumer.

1. Paul Doherty (1989) 'Geographical Perspectives on the Belfast Region'. *Area*. 21:3, p. 339.

2. Cornelia Albert (2008) *The Peacebuilding Elements of the Belfast Agreement and the Transformation of the Northern Ireland Conflict*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, p. 152.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

4. Scott Bollens (2000) *On Narrow Ground: Urban Policy and Ethnic Conflict in Jerusalem and Belfast* Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 266.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

6. David Russell (2005) 'Belfast: Strategies for a Shared City'. *Shared Space: A research journal on peace, conflict and community relations in Northern Ireland*. 1, p. 26.

7. William Neill (1992) 'Reimagining Belfast'. *Fortnight*. 309, p. 9.

Theology

Turning to theology, transforming identities to bring about reconciliation has a biblical precedent. Writing to the church in Corinth in the first century CE, Paul urged the church to forgive those in the congregation who had caused hurt. Paul linked his call for them to reconcile directly to their new identity in Christ.

“If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”⁸

The differences between them were to be subsumed into their newly-found shared identity as Christians. In another letter, Paul put it this way:

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”⁹

In twenty-first century Belfast, this might read: “There is no longer Catholic nor Protestant, republican nor loyalist, nationalist nor unionist, for all of you are one in the economy of consumerism.”

Consumerism

Consumerism is a theology. It is a religion. It provides a new, transcendent identity for those who attend its places of worship and bow before its gods. Theologian William Cavanaugh writes:

“Consumerism has certain affinities with the great faith traditions [...] because [...] it trains us to transcend the material world. Not only do we seek to leave behind the bodily language that goes into making things. Consumerism represents a constant dissatisfaction with particular material things themselves, a restlessness that constantly seeks to move beyond what is at hand.”¹⁰

The role of theology is to critique as well as understand. As such, theology asks questions such as: What is the substance of this peace that shopping centres bring? Where has the violence gone? What does it mean for the identity of consumer to transcend all other identities? What does the religion of consumerism in the temples of shopping centres mean?

8. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, NRSV.

9. Galatians 3:28, NRSV.

10. William Cavanaugh (2008) *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 48.

Ancient Israel, like the island of Ireland, was a society wounded by centuries of violent conflict. Peace came to Israel for a few years, and was celebrated by the country's religious and political leaders. Yet the prophet Jeremiah saw through their celebrations. He said of the leaders:

“They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace.”¹¹

Jeremiah contradicted the wisdom of the day, declaring that there was no peace even though violence had ceased for a time. This peace was false peace because it was founded on the worship of false gods. “God's people have committed two evils,” he bellowed. “They have forsaken the Almighty, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.”¹²

Consumerism is a cracked cistern rather than a fountain of living water. Consumerism is a false god. As William Neill writes, “Post-modern consumerist imagery can offer, at best, distraction rather than more acceptable substitute identities.”¹³ The cracked cistern of consumerism is too broken and too shallow to hold the abundant living waters of peace and forgiveness.

Consumerism helps to bring an end to interpersonal violence between consumers. However, it does not bring an end to violence. The violence is directed elsewhere - inwards, into the inner, spiritual lives of consumers, and outwards, into the economic structures of globalisation.

The inner violence manifests itself as a constant feeling of dissatisfaction. Consumerism is a “school of desire”.¹⁴ It teaches us what we desire, then when we get what we desire, we remain dissatisfied, and are taught new desires. It also teaches us that our identity is wrapped up in our possessions. “We are what we possess. We are, consequently, possessed by our possessions.”¹⁵

Steven Shakespeare explains that in the religion of consumerism “nothing really new or different happens. There are new products, programmes, technologies, ways of working. But everything is still geared to producing objects that fulfil our nameless lack. Different commodities simply represent different quantities of consumption. In the end, they can all be converted into money, the most abstract sign of sameness. Capitalism is constantly producing 'novelty' - but nothing new ever happens. [...] There is no exit.”¹⁶

Liberation theologian Rubem Alves likens consumerism to a prison. Alves tells the story of a prisoner put in solitary confinement in a small prison cell. He hates his confinement and spends his days plotting a way to escape. Another prisoner is put

11. Jeremiah 8:11, NRSV.

12. Jeremiah 2:13, NRSV.

13. Neill, 'Reimagining Belfast', p. 9.

14. Steven Shakespeare (2007) *Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Introduction*. London: SPCK, p. 120.

15. John Francis Kavanaugh (1981) *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, p. 26.

16. Shakespeare, *Radical Orthodoxy*, pp. 122-123.

into a castle with 1,001 rooms. Exploring the rooms - and having so many to choose between - he never realizes that the doors out of the castle are locked. He does not realize that he is a prisoner.¹⁷

We become addicted to running through the rooms, looking for a place to call home, that we never think to look for the exit.¹⁸

“This is the first principle for control of the imagination,” writes Alves. “Create so many objects of desire that the mind will be kept moving from one to another, without ever being able to move beyond them.”¹⁹

As consumers, we feel like we have almost an infinity of choices. We can buy a rock CD or a country and western record; we can go on holiday to the local beach or to Barbados; we can wear a red t-shirt or a blue jumper, with an endless range of brands to choose between. We can eat Italian, Indian, Chinese or Mexican food. Yet, in truth, all these choices end up being the same. They hold us within the prison bars of being a consumer. Few see the prison walls, and even fewer escape.

The prophet Isaiah asks: “Why spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?”²⁰ Searching for peace in cracked cisterns will never lead to true peace.

Consumerism, then, is a form of violence against our inner beings. It is a warping of desire that keeps us forever dissatisfied. Consumerism is “the commodification of our desires, our values, and ultimately, our selves.”²¹

Consumerism also results in violence against other people and against the earth. Consumerism encourages us to view other people as disposable commodities. We begin to relate to one another as obstructions rather than as human beings.²²

Consumerism exports violence overseas. The violence that was once between Protestants and Catholics is directed elsewhere, in the form of structural violence and poverty. The farmers who produce our cheap bananas, coffee, and chocolate, the sweatshop workers who sew our clothes for pennies an hour, the factory workers who produce our televisions, computers and iPhones are trapped in poverty. Their poverty allows us to buy cheap goods, to be conspicuous consumers. Latin American theologian Leonardo Boff explains that within consumerism “there is no solution for the poor, no respect for basic rights, and no satisfaction of basic needs.”²³ Consumerism perpetuates the system where a small proportion of the world's population controls most of the resources. This structural violence directed against the poor keeps the peace in Ireland. At the same time, the structural violence induced by consumerism is shut away from the consumer. Consumers don't have to know or worry about it.

17. Rubem Alves (1972) *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity and the Rebirth of Culture*. London: SCM Press Ltd, p. 26.

18. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, p. 24.

19. Alves, *Tomorrow's Child*, p. 26.

20. Isaiah 55:2, NRSV.

Consumerism is destroying the earth. The earth's resources - this means beautiful, life giving landscapes, rainforests, lakes, rivers, and seas, well-springs of living water - are plundered to make cheap goods for consumers. Cheap food and consumer goods are only possible because we burn fossil fuels, causing climate change. The energy we get from fossil fuels - most of which is used to benefit the rich western world - is equivalent to having 22 billion slaves working for us.²⁴ Fossil fuels have made us used to lazy living and to being disconnected from the earth which supplies our needs.

Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, not only refers to an absence of violence, but also to the struggle against injustice and oppression. When Jeremiah declared there was no peace, no shalom, he meant that despite the lack of violence in Israel, injustice continued.

“Hear this,” yelled the prophet Amos, a farmer turned God's spokesperson, “you who trample on the needy, and bring ruin to the poor of the land. You have turned justice into poison.”²⁵

Under consumerism, “the chains of violence and domination are not shed. They are merely painted a different color.”²⁶ Justice is turned into poison.

Conclusion

When speaking the Nicean Creed, Christians attest to “look for the resurrection of the dead”. We would do well to look for resurrection, for uprisings of life and for new creations, in our search for peace. Do our solutions for violence nurture the inner life of those being reconciled? Do they create the conditions for peace with the wider world? Or do they merely export violence elsewhere? Are they creative of life and hope rather than provocative of death and destruction?

The Christian way towards peace is not consumerism, but forgiveness: “the practice of forgiveness as the Christian practice most resistant to capital's cycle of violence and competition. Forgiveness is possible for Christians who receive it first as a free gift from God's fullness, and who pattern their lives upon the forgiveness made known in Christ and communicated through liturgy and community life.”²⁷

Whatever our religious convictions, Gordon Lynch's contention rings true in the search for a peaceful society. “We need places that treat us as more than just consumers, places where we can be reminded that we suffer, dream, love, fail and find forgiveness.”²⁸

21. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, p. 24.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

23. Leonardo Boff (1995) *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, p. 124.

24. BBC Television, *Natural World: A Farm for the Future*, BBC2, 20th February 2009.

25. Amos 8:4; 6:12.

On a visit to Belfast last year, sitting in dining room at Belfast International Youth Hostel I overheard a conversation between two middle aged women. One was telling the other about a visit to a shopping centre.

“It was utterly insane,” she said in a rural Irish accent. “People were just buying and buying and buying. They didn't think. They were just buying. It was like a mischievous sprite had taken over, dictating their actions.”

It is worth keeping a look out for the mischievous sprite in our city centres and in our own lives, and, more importantly, where the sprite fails to work his mischievous magic, to look for new life and the resurrection of the dead.

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Economy of Consumerism
Artist: Jayne McConkey

Some thoughts on the process of theological engagement:

David McMillan

Introduction

It would be fair to say that, growing up in the 1960s and '70s in Northern Ireland, theology played little part in my religious experience. In the world in which I lived 'bible teachers' were the oracles and theologians were to be avoided as nothing but trouble, and liberal trouble at that. The academic study of theology was a late arrival in my denominational world and when it did arrive it was much debated and opposed by many. The idea that people would go to a denominational college to attain a degree in theology validated and awarded by a secular institution was for many the thin edge of the liberal wedge.

They need not have feared because theology continued to be taught - in many of the colleges - as the expression or rationale of the various historical confessions or statements of faith and not as an enquiring discipline. This was aided in no small measure by the rise in the '70s and '80s of credible conservative and evangelical biblical scholars publishing academic material. It was possible to produce academic work quoting contemporary scholarship that remained faithful to whatever the denominational standards required. This form of theological studies, in my opinion, contributed nothing to peace on the island of Ireland and in fact failed utterly to engage with the existence of the conflict, focusing as it did on the reinforcement of propositional theological statements. Theological debate for many of us was confined to the finer points of practice and belief within the clearly defined parameters of our theological convictions.

Those who made significant contributions from a theological perspective during the conflict tended to be those who engaged with the wider world of theology and who brought their reflection on experience to bear on the situation. There are numerous examples such as Rev John Dunlop¹ and Rev Ray Davey². There is no doubt that the theological reflection undertaken by people such as they led to very tangible and practical contributions to peace.

1. For an indication of the contribution John Dunlop has made see John Dunlop (1995) *A Precarious Belonging: Presbyterians and the Conflict in Ireland* Belfast: Blackstaff Press.

2. For the background to Davey's contribution see Ray Davey (2005) *The War Diaries: From Prisoner-of-war to Peacemaker*. Belfast: The Brehon Press.

For theological studies to continue to contribute to peace on the island there are, I would suggest, a number of key tasks which must be attended to and which have a bearing on the national, community and personal levels of theological reflection:

- Interrogating: a capacity to problematize rather than rationalize
- Uncovering: a commitment to challenge and explore religious convictions rather than reinforce existing convictions
- Locating: the focus of our faith vision

Interrogating

Ched Myers (1994: 23) laments the fact that 'Many historical forces have created and sustained theology's agreement to rationalize rather than problematize social reality' and argues that part of the nature of Jesus' engagement with the social reality of his day was to raise questions rather than provide justification for his actions and teaching. He refers to this as 'interrogatory theology' and observes that 'If we want to know what Jesus stands for in the conflict-ridden world, we had better be prepared to be questioned by him about our own alignments.' Myers (1994:14) There is no doubt that, for many of us in the early years of the conflict, theology was used to rationalize the situation in which we found ourselves and once rationalized - whether on the basis of the conflict as an expression of human sinfulness, unbiblical rebellion against the authorities, a challenge to the freedom of worship and the preaching the gospel or threat to a godly Protestant heritage - we had the basis of self justification for an intransigent political and moral stance. 'For God and Ulster' was not just the war cry of the paramilitary, it was also the implicit expression of the theological position of many of us in the Protestant community. It is only when theological studies are permitted to problematize the nature of our society and conflict that the possibility of seeing our role in the creation of the problem emerges, for the kingdom of God to become more important than Protestantism and loving one's enemy to become an imperative to be expressed in concrete action. However, the concept of interrogatory theology is not to be shelved on the cessation of conflict, for to sacralize the peace, or the peace process, would ultimately be as dangerous as sacralizing our part in the conflict. Theological studies cannot afford to fail to ask questions of the taken for granted 'goods' of the peace. Can churches be encouraged to go it alone in expressions of dealing with the past rather than wait for the State to take the initiative? Have we a theology of the victim, a theology of remembrance or lament of the dead, a theology of remembering in a decade of critical anniversaries, a theological appraisal of the new emerging power structures in the North³? What questions would Jesus ask of us about our alignments on these issues?

3. David Stephens commented on the Corrymeela Community website: 'We have achieved shared government in Northern Ireland, but what we have achieved parodies and satirises what real shared government is about. In the absence of strong institutions of communal trust and common purpose we default to sectarian defence and protection, to mutual blocking and shared out government. We return to particular unionist and nationalist stories that cannot find a generous place for the 'other'. We want to be winners in the sectarian 'game'. And, if we cannot be winners in that game, we can be better victims. Resentment and blocked revenge and dreams of finding a way to be a winner consume. The argument for the new status quo is the bleak realism of there is no alternative. It is better than it was 20 years ago (true)'. <http://www.corrymeela.org/article/electionthoughts.aspx> - accessed 23/5/2010

Uncovering

It may at first seem a strange statement, but Baptist theologian James McClendon defines theology as '...the discovery, understanding or interpretation, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and to whatever else there is.' (McClendon 2002:23). His thesis is that, for all our talk about what we believe in religious terms, what we are is actually shaped by our convictions, those 'gutsy beliefs that I live out - or in failing to live them out, I betray myself.' (McClendon 2002:22). Theological studies cannot afford to trust religious language or fail to investigate what lies beneath religious talk for it may be nothing more than a thin veneer. Claire Mitchell makes the point that 'Theologies must always be seen as constructed in particular times, places and historical contexts. They reflect as well as help create political ideas and behaviours ...theology and politics are mutually conditioning. Each informs the other in a complex two-way relationship.' (Mitchell 2006:131-2). The kind of theological investigation required may have little to do with presenting religious language and categories and may need to encompass sociological, ethnological and psychological insights, requiring theological studies to work within an interdisciplinary context in seeking to uncover what lies beneath and engage in the task of critical transformation of faith communities.

Convictions are shaped and shared within communities on the basis of loyalties, world views and other basic presuppositions. Theological studies need to not only interrogate the social order but the convictional make up of our own communities exposing, challenging and transforming the 'gutsy beliefs' that make us what we are. Beneath the religious veneer may lie the horrors of prejudice, fear, power, and a host of other values requiring transformation. The more honestly we can expose what shapes and drives us, the greater the possibility of seeking to transform our 'gutsy beliefs' in line with the values and practices of the kingdom of God and the capacity for the long term task of building peace.

Locating

While there is clearly the necessity for ecumenical engagement in theological discussion, in our Irish context critical theological investigation is by necessity self involving and therefore rooted in some expression of Christian community. As Gadamer points out life is lived and understood within historically effected boundaries,⁴ or horizons. His concept of 'historically effected consciousness' and his insistence on the universality of hermeneutics⁵ forces us to attend to the religious boundaries and horizons of our faith location. Failure, or inability, to locate and recognise our own theological vision leads to a number of distortions in our theological reflection and engagement.

4. Gadamer says, "When a naive faith in scientific method denies the existence of effective history, there can be an actual deformation of knowledge." The point is well made and has clear implications for a naive faith in our own theological reasoning. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Joel Weinsheimer, and Donald G. Marshall, (2004) *Truth and Method*, (2nd revised edn.) London: Continuum. p.300

5. Grondin explains that Gadamer's concept of universality is not a claim that is being made about his (Gadamer's) position or views but that, "... hermeneutic inquiry cannot be limited to the ancillary problem of devising a methodology for the human sciences. ...[but] ...becomes the central occupation of philosophy." Jean Grondin, (1994) *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Yale Studies in Hermeneutics. New Haven; London: Yale University Press p.121-2.

Firstly there is the tendency to have a misguided belief in our own objectivity. Much of the dogmatism expressed during theological discussion on peace, both from peace makers and conflict apologists, stems from an arrogance of assumption that our position is the position that any right thinking person would adopt, therefore our analysis is truly objective, our conclusions incontrovertibly valid. When we engage in the task of articulating our own theological vision and location we at least have the opportunity to acknowledge its limitations and bias.

Secondly, a failure to be able to articulate something of our own vision and locatedness creates the likelihood that in engagement with others our conversations will continually be at cross purposes. We may share a common religious language and theological terminology but may mean quite different things when discussions, such as this one, are conducted in a shared space. Knowing, as best I can, who I am and what is the core of my theological vision allows me to discuss with you in the context of a healthy perspectivism⁶.

Thirdly, a failure to attend to my own locatedness leads to an inclination to be dictatorial. Unthinking dogmatism is unhelpful enough but the failure to attend to my own locatedness, and therefore care little about yours, will incline me from simply being dogmatic to becoming dictatorial and confrontational.

Conclusion

A great deal will emerge from conversations such as the one in which we are engaged which will provide useful and even fresh insight. It is hoped that this contribution adds three helpful watchwords to the conversation in considering the contribution of theological studies to the pursuit of peace speaking to the national, community and personal dimensions: interrogating, uncovering and locating.

6. For a brief but succinct appraisal on why such discussions need not descend to relativism see the section on imperialism, relativism and perspectivism in James Wm. McClendon Jr. & James Smith (2002) *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*. (revised edn). Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers p.8-9.

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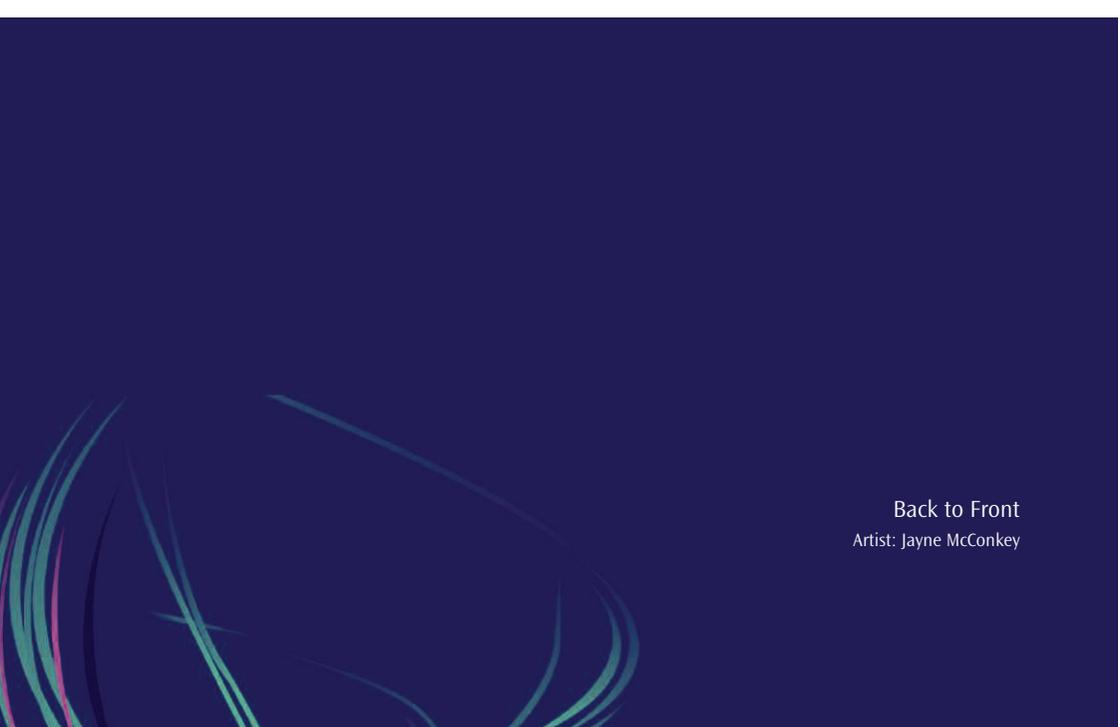
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Theological Contributions to Peace: Ricœur, Mutual Recognition and Agape. Amy Louise Daughton

This short paper intends to look at an intersection between a philosophical examination by Paul Ricœur of the ethics of personhood and concepts of theology and peace. I will outline that ethics of personhood as he expresses it in the intersubjectivity of self and other, then show how he later recasts this in terms of a key word, recognition. That idea of how recognition is expressed between self and other is a useful normative description of concrete historical interaction, and for our purposes conflict situations, and I will close with the theological tools to which Ricœur turns in order to reach the pinnacle of mutual recognition towards which his whole project is aimed.

When discussing Ricœur's ethics of personhood, the natural place to begin is the famous 'little ethics' of Oneself as Another¹. It is here that personal identity is revealed as mostly coherently narrative, to show changes in time, and identity is wholly revealed as an ethical concern, by the reveal of the fullest extent the role of the other in self-narration.

Firstly, and mimetically, we learn to narrate the self, by hearing other narrations². Secondly, there is also the more direct appearance of other people as characters in the story of the self - the concrete encounter. Thirdly and lastly, the other is present as audience. The role of the other as audience is crucial. It is the German theological ethicist Hille Haker who provides this insight, describing the audience of the other to the self as the context of self-worth. The context provides content to the "good life" while self-worth reenergises the self in the self-generating "desire to live well with and for others in just institutions" - 'it is therefore the sense of self-worth which moves the concern with the good life into the area of ethics'³. The involvement of the other, judging, has opened out the construction of personal identity to ethics.

Moreover, the other as audience, judging the story of the self, becomes a dialogical partner. To clarify the ethical impact of this turn, Ricœur argued

'Even the grammatical second person...would not be a person if I did not suspect that, in addressing me, it realises it is capable of designating itself as that which addresses itself to me and thus turns out to be capable of the self-esteem defined by intentionality and initiative.'⁴

The obligation of recognising the other as like another self is embedded in Ricœur's ethical trajectory of 'living well, with and for others, in just institutions'. The reflexivity of the relationship between self, other, and institution enables us to shape

1. P. RICŒUR *Oneself as Another*, Tr. K. BLAMEY, (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1992), specifically chapters 6-8.

2. This is more strongly expressed in P. RICŒUR, *Time and Narrative 1*, trs. K. MCLAUGHLIN, D. PELLAUER, (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1984).

3. H. HAKER 'Narrative and Moral Identity in the work of Paul Ricœur' in *Concilium - Creating Identity*, eds. H. HARING, M. JUNKER-KENNY, D. MIETH (London, SCM Press, 2000), p. 65.

4. P. RICŒUR, 'Approaching the Human Person' in *Ethical Perspectives 6*, Tr. D. KIDD (1999), p. 46

and be shaped by each. Capable of this reflexivity, the other is truly co-constitutive of the historical, concrete self who narrates, who speaks and acts. Co-constitutive, equally with the capable self, of the possibility of narration, of speaking at all.

I turn now to the recasting of that complex dialectic in terms of recognition. Even within that phenomenology of action, Ricœur has shown that meaning starts with the self, and specifically, his or her self-attested capability for action. The other is referred to in relation to the attestation of the self, as a critical audience. Ricœur identifies attestation as semantically close to self-recognition, by emphasising the ancient nature of attestation as self-reflection⁵. The self recognises itself, and demands a response from the other - that other's response, recognising the self as itself, is the context of self-worth. It also opens out the problematic of doing justice to the other, by recognising her too - that risks remain asymmetrical.

When attesting to its own capabilities - the "I can" as the basic self-expression - the self turns to the other to so attest. Self-attestation begins recognition, and so its confident presentation is paired with the passive need to be recognised by others. That need is ongoing.

Yet a purely reciprocal response would not be satisfying. What is desired is a reliably returning recognition that is freely offered by the other, chosen by the self despite the risk of a refusal. After all, the alternative is mere reciprocity - a kind of commercial exchange, I will recognise your personhood if you recognise mine. That is not true recognition - and it is also exhausting. Moreover, it is dangerous, we run a risk in recognising the other in advance, and in presenting the self to be recognised. There could be a refusal. The refusal of the personhood of particular groups has been a particularly strong characteristic in conflict situations. The twentieth century alone contains some obvious and dramatic examples. So insisting on recognition of the self gets characterised as a struggle, while the other, too, struggles to be recognised by the self. It's worthwhile noting here that that emphasis on *Anerkennung* as struggle is a Hegelian tradition, but Axel Honneth has 'an approach that aims to reappropriate Hegel's model as a stimulus for a normatively substantive theory of society, a merely speculative foundation is not sufficient'⁶. Honneth insists on looking at concrete institutions as a foundation for critiquing society.

Ricœur, detouring through that sociological space⁷, quotes Hegel directly, noting that while the struggle for recognition is a key characteristic of human activity, its 'conflictual style, [can] end up as an infinite demand, a kind of "bad infinity"⁸. So, over against the experience of the struggle for recognition, Ricœur describes the state of "peace." The experience of the state of peace is found in 'symbolic mediations as exempt from the juridical as from the commercial order of exchanges'⁹. This allows us to step out of the reciprocal framework of recognition that characterises our

5. And here we look to Sophocles, Homer, and the ancient Greek tradition of tragedy

6. A. HONNETH, (1996) *The Struggle for Recognition - The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, tr. J. ANDERSON, (Cambridge; MA, MIT Press), p. 68.

7. See also: N. FRASER, A. HONNETH, (2003) *Redistribution or Recognition? A Politico-Philosophical Exchange*, trs. J. GOLB, J. INGRAM, C. WILKE, (London, Verso).

8. P. RICŒUR, (2005) *The Course of Recognition*, Tr. D. PELLAUER (Boston, Harvard University Press), p. 218.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

constant seeking of the stage of mutual recognition. Mutually spontaneous recognition of the other, where the struggle for recognition is no longer necessary to express. Ricœur describes this achievement as a state of peace¹⁰.

Yet to grasp this state of peace is a difficult challenge. Ricœur suggests that to do so simply, we need to refer to a cultural, religious model of that mutuality, such as agape. For Ricœur Agape, traditionally characterised in Christian contexts as selfless love, 'transcends the discrete acts of individuals in the situation of the exchange of gifts'¹¹. Rather than returning to the reciprocal obligation to return a gift, where there is an immediate and continuing search for increasingly exact equivalence, agape allows for the paradox of returning the gift, unnecessarily. It describes justness, rather than justice achieved. The alternative "bad infinity", where no recognition is ever enough, the need for "feast" damages the person: it 'transforms him into an anonymous agent of a system that surpasses him and one that perpetuates itself as a system only through oscillations'¹². Reciprocity is transcended by mutuality, as an alternative to that *ut des*, 'give that you may give' construction. So while conflict always remains to be overcome, each conflict does at least become the opportunity for mutual recognition, transcending systematic reciprocity. It can be, hopefully, reenergised by these possibilities.

For Ricœur then, mutual recognition as a state of peace becomes characterised most appropriately as a gift, which can take both a ceremonial and a practical shape. The self, attesting herself before the other demands a recognition that at the same time has to remain free. Paradoxically, that demand creates a system of reciprocal obligatory recognition. Yet, the response of recognition of the other as the image of restitution, is only the next level. The gift of the self is where the self voluntarily undertakes the fulfilment of the obligation to recognise the other, taking on the symbolic charge of the "first gift". Phenomenologically, there are 'two levels, that of actual practices and that of an autonomous circle endowed with self-transcendence'. Gift-giving as recognition of the other is a 'response to a call in the generosity of the first gift...under the sign of agape'¹³. That gift suspends the struggle for recognition, it does not resolve it: We cannot

'forget the originary asymmetry in the relationship between the self and others, which even the experience of [peace] does not manage to abolish. Forgetting this asymmetry, thanks to the success of analyses of mutual recognition, would constitute the ultimate misrecognition at the very heart of actual experiences of recognition'¹⁴.

This is why recognition of the other still carries its risks. Indeed, the 'gift, apart from its symbolic, indirect, rare, even exceptional character, is inseparable from its burden of potential conflicts, tied to the creative tension between generosity and obligation'¹⁵.

Finally, there are two things happening here that I need to emphasise. Firstly, peace as such is getting redefined - peace is an experience of mutual recognition that does not last. By its nature as an instance of unnecessary, generous gift, outside any systematic reciprocity, it is not an extended state. Peace is never achieved in the sense of a final goal. Instead it is recast, using explicitly religious vocabulary, as an instant of mutual recognition, of a gift granted by both sides, both persons, that must be begun again each time, to overcome the priority of self and the resulting asymmetry between persons. Yet that agape, that selfless quality required from both persons, rescues it from the Hegelian “bad infinity” of conflict. Secondly, for this to be a “contribution to peace” as it is understood in terms of conflict resolution on the island of Ireland and elsewhere, is another task again. It suffices, for this paper, to highlight the unusual move in Ricœur specifically to look to theology and religious vocabulary when working through a philosophical construction. He ordinarily seeks to keep the two separate, considering theology as inappropriate for establishing a reliable philosophical framework - ultimately, too particular to be helpful. Here, agape, the gift, mutual recognition as peace is crucial for transcending the reciprocal, springing from asymmetry. Yet, too, we fall back from that gift, to the ongoing relationship, where we stand continually summoned to mutual recognition with the other. So while any practical contribution to the particular historical situation of the island of Ireland remains in suspension, it is at least useful to see the extraordinary value that is placed on the theological contribution to that process, even while remembering the real challenges that lie behind it.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 245.



Artist: Jayne McConkey

Training in a Local Theology of Reconciliation

John Peacock

If a local theology starts from the context that the community of faith is living in, then a local theology growing out of a context of conflict must include, even major on, reconciliation. Local theology in this context must have a role to play in building political and social reconciliation.

Reconciliation

A local theology of reconciliation may be the place to counter the world view which Walter Wink describes as the 'myth of redemptive violence'. Wink suggests that 'violence is the ethos of our times. It is the spirituality of the modern world. It has been accorded the status of a religion, demanding from its devotees an absolute obedience to death. This myth of redemptive violence undergirds American popular culture, civil religion, nationalism and foreign policy.'¹

On the world stage these convictions can be clearly identified in the current 'war on terrorism'. But in every conflict this myth of redemptive violence can be seen in the sense of 'us' against 'them', the sense that God is on 'our' side, that 'our' violence is good but 'their' violence is bad, that 'we' suffer as 'we' defend 'ourselves', while 'they' are the aggressors, the cause of chaos and they can expect legitimate punishment for their evil.

Christians, followers of the Prince of Peace who taught that we should love our enemy, need to find a theology of reconciliation that counters the all-pervading outcomes of following this myth. The starting place must be to see the evil in our position and the good in our enemy. We need to see that the line between good and evil runs through each of us rather than between us and our enemies.

'It would mean seeing God in the enemy as we learn to see God in ourselves - a God who loves and forgives and can transform even the most evil person or society in the world.'²

The model can be applied directly into the Northern Ireland situation where both sides in the conflict have claimed God on their side. Loyalists fight for 'God and Ulster' and lay claim to be 'British Israelites', 'the lost tribe of Israel', 'the remnant - God's Chosen People'. For Republicans, the cry is for 'God and Ireland', they claim God is on their side, that God has a special fondness for Irish soil.

1. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) p.13

2. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) p.16-17

This gave religious legitimacy for violence on both sides. Republicans had justification for an armed struggle for freedom from a foreign oppressor. Loyalists, on the other hand, claimed to be defending not only their own suffering people but also freedom of speech and religion. Indeed, this myth of redemptive violence gave credence to the notion of loyalist paramilitary/security force collusion against the perceived evil violence of Republicanism. A local theology of reconciliation in Ireland must find a Christian way of understanding the Gospel which counters this myth of redemptive violence and allows God to speak without undertones of divisive nationalism or patriotism.

Local Initiative

'Their factions have been so long envenomed, and they have such narrow ground to do their battle in, that they are like people fighting with daggers in a hog's head.'

Sir Walter Scott, 1825

Based on this quote, historian A.T.Q. Stewart has described Ireland as 'The Narrow Ground'. We live as a small island community and so we find it difficult to find space for others, we find it difficult to live at peace, we find it hard to see our land as a shared space rather than a contested space.

However there are examples of churches and communities of faith who have worked on a local theology of reconciliation and have used it as a basis for creating room to build up trust, ecumenical interest and reconciliation between people of different theological and political viewpoints, 'communities of the new commandment'³ as Ken Newell has described them.

Corrymeela Community

One such community is Corrymeela which has worked hard to maintain a relevant theology of reconciliation in the changing face of Ireland.

Seeing David Stevens, the leader of the Corrymeela community, as a friend and mentor, I took the aperture of writing this paper, as an opportunity to have a conversation with him, and anyone who knew David, knows that a conversation with David was never social chat but always went straight to the heart of the matter. Sadly, since having the conversation, David died on 23 May, 2010 following a short illness. His theological understanding (recorded in his books: *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation*; & *The Place called Reconciliation: texts to explore*), his interpretation of the Irish context and his dry wit will be greatly missed. Hence, this paper focuses on David and Corrymeela by way of tribute to him.

David had a reserved overview of where we have come to, in terms of reconciliation in Ireland. Whilst he identified that there are many people involved in ecumenical initiatives, he believed that we have not even 'reached first base' in terms of reconciliation. David recognised a self-sufficiency currently within the catholic community in the North whereas the Protestant community has retreated into itself, becoming angry, cynical and apathetic.

For David, Corrymeela faces a major challenge in finding ways of reaching into these communities, of reaching the young people, as well as reaching the growing ethnic minorities and asylum seekers who have taken up residence in Ireland. He identified the need to reach those from different nationalities and different faiths while still maintaining the Christian ethos of the Corrymeela community.

Whilst there is political accommodation and a removal of mainstream terrorism, David correctly pointed out that the community in the North is more segregated than ever, and there are more instances of interface tension than at many times during the 'Troubles'.

David believed our current peace agreement was born out of political expediency more than a desire for peace and so it is vital that groups, like Corrymeela, continue to emphasise the need for reconciliation.

Corrymeela has had a major, if perhaps indirect, influence on Ireland since its founding in 1965. The community was established by Ray Davey, then Presbyterian chaplain of Queen's University, and a group of friends and students, one of whom was John Morrow, who would later succeed Ray Davey as the leader of Corrymeela Community.

Corrymeela was not set up to deal with the recent 'Conflict', for

'Corrymeela members had long pursued ecumenical activities, and had long sought better understanding between Protestants and Catholics in N.I.'⁴

In 1966, the community had organised a 'Joint Protestant and Catholic Conference', about which The Belfast Telegraph said,

'Through Captain O'Neill and those who organised the community conference, Corrymeela takes its place in Irish history.'⁵

Corrymeela has had an impact on ecumenism and reconciliation in N.I. and beyond, while holding on to its Christian principles. They have worked hard to let

4. R.A. Wells, *People behind the Peace*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999) p.70
5. Ray Davey, *A Channel of Peace*, (Marshall Pickering, 1993) p.82

'the Christian message break through the structures - political, social and ecclesiastical - that imprison society in general, and in so doing bring liberation and hope for every man and woman.'⁶

At the heart of the conflict in the early 70's Corrymeela was at the heart of practical love and reconciliation. It offered refuge for those burnt out of Belfast and it offered a place of reflection and hope for those worst affected by the violence.

'For many of the guests, a real distinction began to emerge between religion (which for them meant sectarian bigotry) and Christianity (which meant acceptance, love and care).'⁷

This early departure into work with the grassroots made it clear that this, originally Protestant community, could not define its theology or its work practices too closely. And so, while the leaders of Corrymeela did not want to operate on the level of lowest common denominator ecumenism, the basis of faith which they came up with was simply: 'We believe in God as revealed in Jesus Christ and in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit'.

Due to the visits of Roel Kaptein from the Netherlands, Corrymeela has been deeply influenced by the theology of Rene Girard. He

'developed the insight (that) The God of Israel was perceived not as the God of the scapegoaters. Instead, their God was identified with the scapegoats. The attempt to make a scapegoat out of Jesus fails because He unmasks the deception. It is now possible to build community without scapegoating others as we are set free from this mimesis of desire through our relationship with Jesus.'⁸

Corrymeela has had to develop its theology on the basis of the people and the situations it is called to face. As leader of the Community, David Stevens saw the major impact of the Corrymeela being through relationships and through the residential experience, people having memorable and life-changing experiences. Corrymeela's strategy is and will be to work in partnership with other organisations with the aim of influencing and transforming the churches.

It is hoped that many, who have no church background, will come along to Corrymeela and that the atmosphere of the community will enable many, particularly young people, to find the space to make choices about faith. David's hopes for the community were that they focus on what people need, that Corrymeela will be a place of compassion not counselling, that it is and will be about practically coming alongside people, accompanying them on their journey and offering simple

6. Alf McCreary, *Corrymeela: Hill of Harmony in N.I.* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976) p.112

7. R.A. Wells, *People behind the Peace*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999) p.76

8. John Morrow *On the Road to Reconciliation* (Dublin: Columba 2003) p.57

instrumental assistance. It is hoped that people will find a new positive experience at Corrymeela, that will help them focus on the future, rather than focussing on the problems of the past.

Future leadership of Corrymeela will face many difficulties and challenges in preserving the ethos of the place. The aim is that the community would be a place where the Biblical meaning of reconciliation would be worked out in the wider social and political settings.

Conclusion

A local theology of reconciliation must be taught in theological colleges in Ireland, because “for churches (and) faith communities to do nothing is to continue to collude with the sectarian system.”⁹

A constructive local theology of reconciliation in Ireland should be about 'presence' rather than 'proclamation'. People of faith must come into continual and continuous contact with the local community they wish to influence and reconcile to each other and to God. We must be catalysts for change rather than acting like 'assault troops' who hop out of the trenches to evangelise the unsuspecting community and then quickly return to the safety of our walled sanctuaries. We must develop a theology which emphasizes how much 'we care about people' rather than how much 'we know about God'.

9. Joe Liechty, & Cecelia Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*, (Dublin: Columba Press, 2001) p.346



Walls

Artist: Jayne McConkey

Complicating Theology (...in a good way).

By Jon Hatch

Do theological studies make a tangible and practical contribution to peace on the island of Ireland? Like any question in which Ireland is the subject, this question resists an easy answer. But maybe there's a more basic question: does it matter?

I'd suggest casting a look back several decades to 1957 and ask: did anyone then foresee 1969? The benefit of hindsight shows that many of the social conventions that overlaid Northern Ireland since its creation in 1921 were paper-thin. No one had the sociological imagination- perhaps not even the sociological language¹- to describe and analyse the forces that were seeing Ireland north and south awkwardly developing into 'inward-looking, pedantic theocracies'². For a variety of reasons all related to sectarian division and political stagnation, the 'signs of the times' mentioned in Vatican II, the nascent ecumenical movement and post-colonial global zeitgeist were greeted by a crippling scepticism. By 1969, as civil conflict spread and fear and anger became the dominant emotions, it was too late. We would spend the next forty years recovering from that lack of foresight.

Now, more than a decade on from the Good Friday Agreement, our political institutions function- just; our economy functions- just; a 2008 parade in Belfast city centre of the Royal Irish Regiment returning from Iraq and Afghanistan passed off without incident- thanks to a massive expenditure of security muscle and money to keep crowds of angry Loyalists and Republicans apart³; the PSNI reports an average of thirty sectarian instances across the province every week; the next election raises the possibility of Sinn Féin becoming the largest party in the assembly and the possibility of Unionists refusing to accept a Republican First Minister; and Sinn Féin propose a referendum on Irish unity to coincide with the 2016 centenary of the 1916 Rising⁴.

We have no way of knowing what Ireland in 2018 will look like, any more than those in 1957 could foretell 1969. But if our future is to be different from our past, we need to 'do' Irish theology differently. And our theological study has a role to play.

I would argue that our theological study in Ireland has lacked complexity. More specifically, our theology has been (for want of a better word) uncomplicated. Our theological study has had as its starting point the unconscious subtext of 'don't mention the war.' For various reasons, again mostly to do with our long history of cultural and political conflict combined with a lack of meaningful interaction between divided parts of our community, we have craved the simplicity and safety of absolutes- of doctrine, identity and belonging. We have demanded theology of exclusiveness and stark contrast. We have talked about the 'other's' theology, but

1. At the time, conflict analysis and resolution was in its infancy and focussed on large-scale conflicts as opposed to localized ones. See Louis Kriesberg, 'The Development of the Conflict Resolution Field' in Conflict Resolution, Vol. 1, (2006) Daniel Druckman and Paul F. Diehl, eds. London: Sage Publications, 108-109.

2. Dennis Carroll (1998), Unusual Suspects- Twelve Radical Clergy, Blackrock: Columba Press, 174.

3. BBC News 'Good Fences, Good Neighbours' http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics_show/7706233.stm (accessed May 12, 2010).

rarely with each other about that theology. Irish Christians are, of course, not the only ones to do this, but it is in Ireland that the end results have been particularly stark, leading Irish ecumenist Geraldine Smyth to state:

In the struggle to overcome violence, Christians must face up to their own responsibility for the fact that sectarianism has cost lives, that divided churches cost lives, and that this stifles the gospel of peace ⁵.

In a context of deep divisions, ongoing sectarianism and a history of violence, it is only natural to crave simplicity; complexity is difficult and complication is tiring. But it would be tragic to view complexity in exclusively negative terms. Scientific observation constantly reminds us that complexity is a sign of life and function. And the complex life that humanity enjoys allows us the richness of feeling, beauty, desire and thought that simple amoebic life does not experience. However, in a context such as ours, embracing complexity is often perceived as heretical and dangerous. Throughout the conflict, we did not worship together, did not seek after God together. The theological interaction we did have was either in secret or in a tightly controlled setting. But now that the worst of the recent conflict has receded, we face a moment requiring sober and mature theological peacemaking, and it demands embracing complexity- in a sense, complicating our lives, complicating our theology. In our context, that will mean complicating ourselves relentlessly and publicly with the reality of each other.

Jesus was constantly complicating peoples' theology and the clearly-delineated boundaries of his community. At least two of his disciples favoured armed struggle against occupation⁶; another was an employee of the occupational authorities⁷. He complicated Sabbath theology⁸, the theology of the ritually unclean and the theology of retributive justice¹⁰. There is even the intriguing suggestion that Jesus' own ethnocentric theology was complicated by the persistent and perhaps angry begging of a marginalized, female foreigner ¹¹.

One such moment of complication occurred for me while living for several years in Montana in the northwest of America. Montana has the distinction of having the largest number of Native American reservations in the US. Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of US history will be aware of the deep divisions between Native Americans and the ancestors of European settlers. Today, the legacy of that 400-year history of violence and disenfranchisement is manifested in levels of poverty, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide on native reservations that are, on average, many times higher than national averages.

4. Belfast Telegraph, "United Ireland Poll by 2016", <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/united-ireland-referendum-poll-1squoteby-2016rquote-14101007.html?startindex=160> (accessed 12 May 2010). It is important to stress that Sinn Féin are perfectly within their rights to pursue this political course, just as the Unionists are within theirs to oppose it. My point is that the relationship between the parties is so dysfunctional that the chances of the debate being civil and respectful are slim. Rarely has a potential crisis in Northern Ireland been marked by such a level of foresight combined by such a level of bewilderment as to how to avoid it.

5. Geraldine Smyth (2001), "Churches in Ireland: Journeys in Identity and Communion", *Ecumenical Review* vol. 53, no. 2, 165.

I was a working musician travelling with a band, and our tour took us onto the Crow Nation Reservation where we were scheduled for a concert in a community hall. Part of our show involved a set of Irish music that I had put together. With me on whistle and bodhrán and others on guitar and mandolin, we played a mix of jigs, reels and traditional Irish songs. The response from the crowd was extremely positive; there was a deep respect for preserved tradition among these people who were fighting a continuous struggle of their own to keep their cultural identity alive.

Well past midnight, back at the house of a Crow family who graciously offered me a bed for the night, I sat up talking with my hosts, their teenage sons and some of their friends. At a certain point, the conversation turned to Ireland. They asked me many questions about Ireland, Irish music and culture, my family, their decision to move to America, and my decision to eventually move back. As I related in broad strokes some of the main events in Irish history, some of the emotions of the Irish people I spoke of as a result of that history- the feelings of loss and marginalization at the hands of those perceived to be powerful foreigners, as well as ongoing sadness and resentment- seemed to resonate with my hosts.

'Wow', commented one young man quietly. 'It sounds like what happened to you people is the same as what happened to us.'

For me and this Crow young man, this was a moment of complication. When we first met, I was simply an 'anglo', the generic and slightly derogatory Native American term for whites. Now I was complex, I had a history and a story, and in certain ways, our stories intersected. We shared a bit more humanity than either of us had previously thought. We both came from people who desired life, dignity and peace. And we both worshipped a God who we believed desired those things for us as well.

We cannot plan how our lives will be complicated by meaningful interaction with each other. It might involve discovering the devout Catholic who votes Unionist; the Church of Ireland priest who is a staunch Republican; the Free Presbyterian who marched in the anti-war demo; the thoughtful and doctrinal Christian who is gay; the asylum-seeker selling newspapers who has a degree in physics; the pastor's wife who is a committed feminist; the Ulster Rugby supporter who cheers for Celtic. They are out there; I have met them all.

The Irish Church in all its diversity needs to ask: how can our theology- and by inference, our theological study- make it easier for these complicated encounters to happen? This goes to the heart of how we 'do' theology: simply by ourselves or complicatedly with each other. This is about doing theology publicly and together or not at all, about encountering God together or (dare I say?) not at all.

6. José María Casciaro (1983) details the etymology of the Hebrew word translated 'zealot' as well as interpretations of Simon Peter's surname 'Bar-Ióna' (detailing etymology that suggests that it is not the Hebrew 'son of John' but an imported Assyrian occupation-era word better translated 'son of terror', i.e., 'terrorist') and Judas Iscariot's surname ('Iskarioth': 'man from Karioth' or 'Sicarius': 'assassin') in Jesus and Politics, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 31-33.

7. Mt. 9:9-13

8. Lk. 13:10-17

Do theological studies make a tangible and practical contribution to peace on the island of Ireland? Not if they are abstract and theoretical and done only in the libraries of Maynooth, Dublin and Belfast. Only if they are real, raw, complex and complicated and done in places like the shadow of the 'peace lines' of Cupar Street and Lanark Way in Belfast, the Northside of Dublin, Moyross in Limerick and the Creggan in Derry.

That's the only theology worth doing; it's only theology I want to do.

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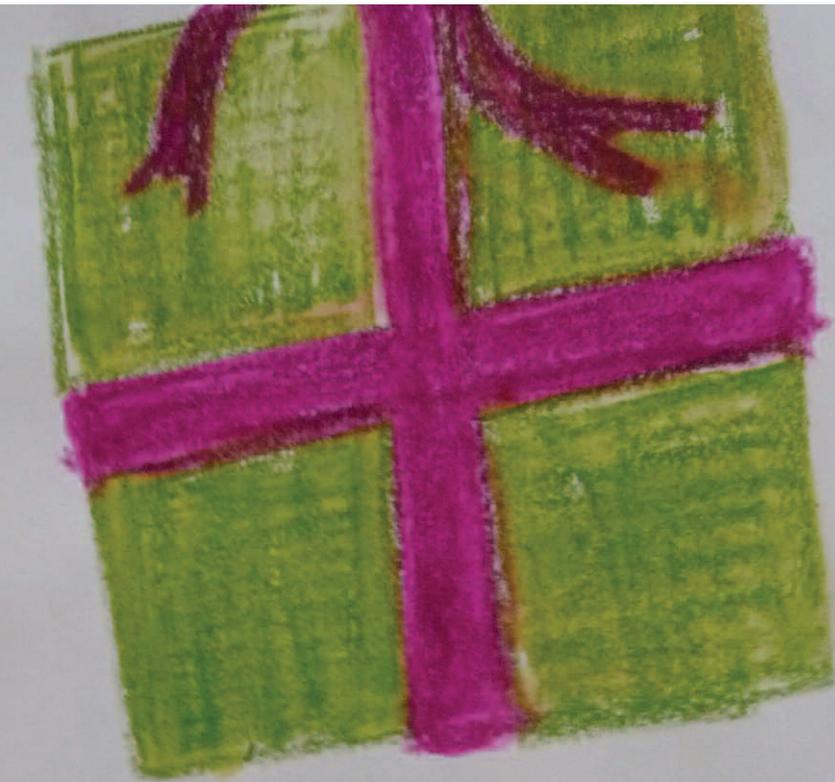
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RISK

Don't be silly: you're all wrong

Eamonn Walls

Introduction

When I studied religion at school we focused on Thomas Aquinas. This was very good for helping me understand why I was a Catholic, but it didn't teach me much about why I wasn't a Protestant. Later at university I read theology and biology, and became very angry at evolution sceptics. As it happened, some of my best friends were Young Earth creationists, and with them I duly joined the QUB Creationist Society. This gave me the important opportunity to listen to the oh-so-hated creationist voice in seminars, lectures and group discussions. None of these activities have changed my attitudes. I continue to believe in evolution, but I do so having had the opportunity to hear the creationist perspective from people who have, through our dialogue, become my friends. Given the circumstances, my dialogues with my creationist friends would typically end in an agreement to disagree. Unfortunately, sometimes listening and agreeing to disagree is the best we can hope for. When sworn enemies meet, sometimes listening becomes both the minimum requirement and the maximum result.

Catholic and Protestants

Catholics in Ireland have an apparently inexhaustible wealth of resources to map out their identity, from GAA sports to the Irish language, family and place names, literature, history, French, American and Scottish ties, and so on. Further on down the list, it turns out the Roman Catholic Church does not have quite so central a place as it once did in the lives of its flock. The Irish Catholic identity has become so secure that it can be separated from its religious foundations. We are not surprised to meet increasing numbers of young people who are proud to call themselves 'Catholic' without being able to tell you the last time they went to mass. In my opinion, this increasing distance from the Church is a good thing, and long overdue. In the light of the Murphy and Ryan reports,¹ it encourages a healthy scepticism and opens channels for criticism of ecclesial authorities.

By contrast, the Protestant identity seems less secure than ever. Some would recount the identity of Ulster Protestantism during the Paisley years as one of principle. The Paisley form of unionism had a sense of principles, and the willingness to stand for those principles, even in the face of adversity. One cannot help but admire the ideal, especially in consideration of religious freedom. The problem was that Paisley Unionism identified itself according to what it opposed - anything that threatened the economic and political privileges of Protestants. We can all be inspired by that special

courage that it takes to stand for principles and religious freedom - but somehow this courage does not seem to have inspired today's Ulster Protestants, who are now trying to find out who they are.

The views expressed above have naturally been disputed, with a number of important historians challenging the validity of these generalisations. Even the historical reality of anti-Catholic discrimination has been challenged, difficult as this is to believe. A good friend of mine, a UUP councillor, has said

They talk about the Catholics being discriminated against, but when I was growing up it felt like we [the Protestant community] were the ones being discriminated against.

This statement was made during the QUB Young Unionists' AGM,² and I was amazed to find the majority of the audience agreeing with the speaker. The feeling among some Protestants that 'we were the ones being discriminated against' has perhaps become part of their identity. Whether or not this is historically true is another question. The point I am making is that in the post-Paisley, 'post-principles' landscape it seems more difficult to pin down exactly what Protestants think about themselves. Now that the worst of the conflict is over, Ulster Protestants don't seem to be quite so sure who they are.

A number of writers have talked about the Northern Ireland conflict as having no solution, with somebody inevitably winning and somebody losing. There may be, regrettably, some truth to this 'win-lose' perspective. The Troubles have been described as a 'zero-sum' game because a solution will never be found that can please everybody. Such a solution does not exist because the foundational agendas of unionism and nationalism are exactly contradictory. Consequently any political change in Northern Ireland that favours one of these agendas, no matter how slightly, must proportionately disfavour the other. No doubt we can all agree that this 'win-lose', 'zero-sum' language is probably not particularly conducive to peace. The question is, is it true?

People and Spaces

There is no reason to suppose that self-consciousness, the recognition of a creature by itself as a self, can exist except in contrast with an other, a something which is not the self. It is against an environment, and preferably a social environment, an environment of other selves, that the awareness of Myself stands out. (Lewis 1996, 19)

2. November 2009. The quote is taken from memory. The accuracy (or otherwise) does not affect the point.

There must be something that makes me different from you - something that means I don't exist in the same way that you do. In order to be 'me', I have to not be you, and in order to be 'you', you have to not be me. We have to escape each other in order to be different. Lacan and Sartre talked about difference being an 'escape' from being, an 'escape' from those forms of existence that are not me. Difference is the escape from being something else, and being me is the state of not being something that is not me (you). This is why some nihilists want to say that being something (me) is largely a matter of not being something else...(you).

My body occupies a physical space, and so does yours, and there is a space between us which neither of our bodies occupy (air). This space is what divides you from me, and makes your body distinct and separate from mine, makes you recognisable as not being the same person as me. It might be described as 'neutral space'. Following this particular model, it would seem that 'shared space', taken literally, does not exist. Two bodies cannot occupy exactly the same physical space at the same time. Our bodies don't overlap, but we might talk about being part of the one body - the body of the Church, perhaps, or the body of Christ. The Church is, in theory, supposed to be a shared and neutral space, where individual bodies and minds can come together.

In Northern Ireland, the shape of society is determined in large part by what individual bodies and minds do not have in common, and by the spaces that they do not share. 'Us' and 'them' are traditionally distinguished along religious lines, such as 'fenian', 'taig', 'prod' and so on. The problem with the 'us and them' style of identification is that different traditions, e.g. Catholic and Protestant, are no longer just 'different', but become 'opposite', and mutually exclusive. My fear is that the Churches, far from challenging this mindset, have often abetted it. The Churches see themselves as bodies that can only survive by mapping out their own personal non-shared non-neutral spaces, complete with white picket fences.

Ideally, Churches should provide a shared and neutral space where anyone from anywhere can come to talk, reflect, pray and meet God. Many Churches unfortunately do not quite reach these lofty targets, in reality often achieving the opposite result. The problem is that Church spaces belong to either Catholics or Protestants, and never by both at the same time. As soon as a space is 'owned' by anyone, it has 'disowned' someone else. Because the Churches have failed to provide these shared and neutral spaces, we find an alternative in shops. Consumerism is the perfect platform for creating such spaces because it is in the interest of companies to exclude no-one from their shop. A shop is owned by nobody of any significance - a faceless American or European investor whose only motive is profit. Money is culturally shared and ontologically neutral. Greed, it turns out, was able to provide a solution before the Churches could. What a pity.

Conclusion

It is not particularly helpful from a reconciliation point of view to talk about winning and losing, zero-sum games and excluding each other in order to be ourselves. The problem is, whether this language is helpful or not, it appears to be reflective of the way things are. In the age of pop-relativism and trendy postmodern magazines, it is frowned upon to say things like 'Catholics do this' or 'Protestants do that'. "That's just a stereotype," our cultural anthropologist tells us. So what? A stereotype isn't wrong because it's a stereotype. It's wrong if it's shown to be wrong. We make generalisations because it helps us to understand the world. If these generalisations no longer reflect the way the world is, then we stop making them.

I pointed out earlier that when sworn enemies meet, the danger is that sometimes listening becomes both the minimum requirement and the maximum result. What can the Churches do to engage in the kind of dialogue where listening is the minimum requirement but not the maximum result? First of all, the utopian picture of a humble theologian who genuinely accepts that they might be wrong is an ideal that everyone appeals to, though nobody ever realises. I certainly don't - though I wish I did. Second, it is very fashionable among reconciliation groups to outlaw certain kinds of language from academic discussion in the interests of not offending anyone and being 'inclusive'. This agenda is doomed from the start, because limiting a person's freedom of speech is just about the most exclusive thing you can do. Within reasonable limits - so long as they're not shooting anyone or inciting hatred - a person has an inalienable right to say what they want. If we have any pretensions to creating a shared and neutral space, then people must be allowed to be themselves. What does 'shared' and 'neutral' mean if I am not allowed to be me?

"Don't be silly: you're all wrong." It won't have escaped you that my title was not meant to be taken literally! And yet, I fear, it is a sentiment heard far too often in Churches and theological colleges. Do theological studies make a tangible and practical contribution to peace on the island of Ireland? My suggested answer is yes and no, though mostly no. Theological studies may help the individual doing the studying, though it is not entirely clear that this prepares the theological student for truthful engagement with people who happen to be different from them.

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Listening
is a minimum
requirement

Listening
Artist: Jayne McConkey

The Holy Rite of Disagreement: Hospitality and Theological Discourse from an Abrahamic Perspective

Jayme Reaves

My Yorkshire-born partner has a plan for bringing peace and reconciliation to Northern Ireland. He proposes that large tents should be put up throughout the province and along the border in open, neutral areas and be supplied with unlimited amounts of free tea and biscuits for as long as necessary.

“Build it and they will come,” he says.

“And who are 'they'?” I ask.

“Everybody!” he replies, “No one can turn down free tea and biscuits - well, or coffee since some people don't like tea. So people from all sides of the community will come for the free tea and biscuits, and then they'll sit down and have a chat and actually get to know one another. They don't have to agree, but they at least might actually hear what the other side has to say. Voila! Peace through PG Tips and jammie dodgers!”¹

The cynical pessimist in me laughs at the naiveté of such an idea. The optimistic idealist in me thinks it's brilliant. But then Oscar Wilde did say that “a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth glancing at,”² so perhaps hopefulness is called for.

My partner, who is a chef by vocation, understands the power of hospitality. The rhythms of eating and drinking, the equalizing potential of sitting around a table, and the ritual of interaction are all elements of hospitality and the industry he works in is named after it. Yet, while we often equate hospitality with tea and biscuits, one cannot be so short-sighted as to not see that it is not limited to only food and drink. Hospitality is about providing safe opportunities and space for sharing, for telling and acknowledging one another's truths, and encouraging as well as challenging those who take part in its rituals.

When asked to consider the question of whether or not theological studies make a tangible and practical contribution to peace on the island of Ireland, the concept of hospitality immediately came to mind. Of course there are questions as to whether or not the practice of hospitality is tangible, but its practicality and ability to contribute towards peace are surely worth considering.

1. Although I acknowledge the choice of tea served could be a source of conflict as well. PG Tips is seen to be an English tea by the Irish, so one might need to go with Nambarrie or some other locally favoured tea instead.

2. Oscar Wilde (1891), “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” Section 24. Found at the Molinari Institute's online library, <http://praxeology.net/OW-SMS.htm>, 7 July 2010. Thanks to my friend and colleague, Jon Hatch, for pointing out to me this sublime truth found in Wilde's writings.

Theological studies have the potential to contribute to the peace in Ireland when ideas are able to be expressed in both a hospitable environment and hospitable manner. Consideration for the other, both in acceptance and respectful challenge, provides a model for a peaceful society that recently has been lacking in a variety of discourses. Furthermore, encouraging recognition that the other has something to teach us helps to calm antagonism.

Civility in the face of differing opinion has diminished considerably in the Western world, even - or perhaps especially - in theological and religious circles. Most recently, US-based Christian magazine, *Sojourners*, encouraged readers to sign the “Covenant for Civility” where ideas related to listening, respect, humility, common good, prayer for enemies, and safety were exhorted in opposition to anger, arrogance, hate and calls for destruction which are currently rife in both theological and social discourse.³

Unsurprisingly, it was then criticized as heresy, as a declaration of war against God, stating “[w]hen our Savior’s honor is at stake, when the integrity of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ is at issue, there can never be peace and civility... [and w]e withstand you frontally with the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God,” successfully providing a perfect example of the situation at hand.⁴

Critics of religious life say this has always been the case. Religion equals intolerance, violence and incivility. It is a particularly common critique in the New Atheist circles and if current debates are proof, they are right.⁵ But to act as if this is the way it has always been or must be because of the inherent nature of religion is false. While there has never been a perfect era, there have been times and instances where hospitality and its corresponding civility were the norm.

Historically, the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam prized their theological discussion, debate and dissent with one another, considering the theological inconsistencies and the working out of such ideas as a sacred and religious discipline. Those considered most faithful and authoritative were those who engaged in dialogue with others, who participated in a holy rite of disagreement, not as an attempt to convert but in the deep belief that God was so great that merely one person could not grasp the entire truth. Inherent in this is humility and an acknowledgment that one person or community does not have all the answers. There was the recognition that one needed the other to test one’s ideas, and welcoming the other into one’s space was part of this desire to know God more fully. To disagree was not to reject but to engage with the other, and in that engagement there is the recognition that one could not walk away unaffected.

3. *Sojourners* (2010), “Covenant for Civility: Come Let Us Reason Together,” <http://www.sojournal.net/index.cfm?action=action.display&item=100308-civility-covenant>. 15 May 2010.

4. Schlueter, Ingrid, “Covenant for Civility” Exposed,” *Crosstalk Blog*, 26 March 2010, <http://www.crosstalkblog.com/2010/03/covenant-of-civility-exposed/>. 16 May 2010. Such statements call into question why we feel a need to protect God’s honour in the first place. Is God not capable of it on God’s own?

5. The notion of hospitality could well be appropriated by all sides on the current public discourses of Religion/Science, with both “sides” using often inhospitable caricatures of the other’s morality, validity and intelligence.

The Jewish rabbinic tradition is particularly well known in this regard. The spirituality of debate and disagreement has been honed over the centuries within Judaism. Examples given of Maimonides participating in this rabbinic tradition debating on how God created the world illustrate this point.⁶ This concept stands within Islam as well, although it may not be as well known. The importance of education and knowledge of the methodology of theological thinking was highly emphasized, teaching its theologians such as Al-Ghazzali to offer an opinion that takes into consideration the ideas that have gone before them. Omid Safi, a contemporary Muslim theologian within Progressive Islam movement, details this process as comparing a variety of schools of thought and then situating one's self within a tradition. This may seem elementary but Safi points out that it is refreshing to see intellectual honesty practised by summarizing “the perspectives of various schools of thought, to legitimize a range of opinions and to acknowledge a spectrum of interpretations!”⁷

Christian theologian Henri Nouwen details this as well, making overt links to hospitality. In his detailing of hospitality as seen in the relationship between a teacher and a student, he says that “hospitality can be seen as a model for a creative interchange between people [and i]f there is any area that needs new spirit, a redemptive and liberating spirituality, it is the area of education.”⁸ Moreover, Nouwen equates teaching with “the commitment to provide the fearless space where...questions can come to consciousness and be responded to, not by prefabricated answers, but by an articulate encouragement to enter into them seriously and personally.”⁹ He continues, stating that “[w]hen we look at teaching in terms of hospitality, we can say that the teacher is called upon to create for his [or her] students a free and fearless space where mental and emotional development can take place.”¹⁰

These three traditions come together when one considers the cooperation of scholars from each of the three Abrahamic traditions and their reliance upon one another in the development of one's own theology. At various points over the centuries, cooperation in theological exploration has been utilized by the Abrahamic traditions. One account of such encounters is as follows:

On countless evenings, the court [of Harun al-Rashid who ruled the Abbasid caliphate from Baghdad] was transformed into an arena for theological debate. Muslim men of learning, schooled in sharia, the law derived from the Quran, offered their wisdom and drew on the philosophical tradition of the ancient Greeks. The works of Aristotle and Plato were translated into Arabic and used not only to enrich Islam but to create new science and new philosophy. And the caliph was not content simply to take the world of his learned men. He wanted to see how their ideas met opposing theologies,

6. Marvin Fox (1995), *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 262ff.

7. Omid Safi (2003), "Introduction: The Times They Are A Changin' - A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*. Omid Safi, ed. Oxford: OneWorld, pp. 19. I find this description shocking in its simplicity. Is this not the very essence of what theological education should be about? And why is it no longer in the majority of theological schools?

8. Henri J.M. Nouwen (1975), *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, pp. 58.

and he invited scholars and preachers of other faiths to his court. Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims engaged in spiritual and spirited jousts, and each tradition was enriched by knowledge of the others.¹¹

The same can be said for the intellectual hospitality found in medieval Iberia, “where the Jewish polymath Maimonides, the Sufi mystic Ibn 'Arabi, and a phalanx of Christian monks helped one another unravel the meaning of God and the universe.”¹² This practice of welcome accompanied by holy debate and disagreement has been largely forgotten.

While much of this debate was intra-religious in the early and medieval periods, it and the corresponding inter-religious discussions still provide an authoritative basis upon which this holy rite could be reclaimed.¹³ In our contemporary context, this discipline of welcoming others of different opinions and beliefs has become threatening. Certainty is valued and there is little desire to be tainted, affected and especially not converted by the other. The practice of hospitality in welcoming others who disagree has been lost within the larger context of religious life.

Yet, welcoming the ideas of other traditions other than one's own in order to enhance one's understanding is still seen as an act of hospitality. The rise in the discipline of scriptural reasoning founded by Jewish scholar Peter Ochs provides an example. While the practice of scriptural reasoning is a particularly Jewish tradition, in recent years it has been made available and encouraged as “an act of hospitality” to the other Abrahamic traditions in order “to form pragmatic hypotheses for guiding shared action toward the 'repair' of the 'failed logic of modernity.’”¹⁴ Responding to the need for shared action that arises from dialogue, understanding and conviction is where relationships between the Abrahamic traditions will flourish, transform society, and help to create a more peaceful future.

Intellectual welcome and its corresponding holy rite of disagreement is, perhaps, not what someone would call a practice of hospitality, but there are discussions going on within scholarship about the importance of creating spaces where a variety of opinions can be expressed. Not only does the diversity of opinion point to the need for an applicable practice of hospitality, but also the ritual of coming together into a safe space to discuss and disagree falls under its grand umbrella. It carries with it connotations of spiritual practice, and the fact that such divergent opinions were allowed to exist as well as be treasured as part of the theological spectrum is remarkable. The heritage that lies before us within theological studies is diverse, and peace is not necessarily contingent upon agreement. If theological discussions were conducted in the way they were carried out historically, then there is tremendous potential for theological studies to provide a model for and contribute to peace on the island of Ireland and, let's think big here, throughout the world. So pitch the tents and put on the kettle. There's work to be done.

9. Nouwen, 60. Italics added.

10. Nouwen, 60.

11. Zachary Karabell (2007), *Peace Be Upon You: Fourteen Centuries of Muslim, Christian and Jewish Conflict and Cooperation*. New York: Vintage, pp. 4.

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12. Karabell, 6

13. Of course this practice was not conducted perfectly by everyone and it did not exist in a vacuum. While leaders such as Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, and Christian monks (including Aquinas) looked to other traditions to help explain their own, there were others who were out to discredit rivals. To pretend as if this is a golden age that was unblemished by competition and intellectual thuggery would be dishonest.

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Tea and Biscuits
Artist: Jayne McConkey

Review Essay: Studying Faith, Practising Peace

Dr Fran Porter

By way of introduction

Born and bred in England, I came to live in Belfast in 1981. It was summer, mid-way through the hunger strike by republican prisoners in the Maze. The ten hunger strikers who died were among 117 people who lost their lives on account of the conflict that year, almost half of them civilians.¹ In the first ten days of taking up residence, three bombs exploded within hearing distance of where I was living. As the years went by, occasionally I would be asked why I had come to Northern Ireland at that time. Had I come to study, to work, to be involved in peacemaking? What had brought me to such a place at such a time? The answer was simple. 'It was love', I would reply, 'I married a Belfast man'.

While it is said that when you marry you take on not only your spouse but their family, in my case I married his country. While having no family history in Ireland, North or South, the place is not 'in my blood' in the sense of the power and call of ancestral voices, it has entered and stayed in my heart and mind. While the conflict has made manifest some of the dreadful attitudes and actions of which humanity is capable, that is far from its whole or, for me, its defining story. For on the island of Ireland I have met many people who embody the human capacity for good; people with depth of wisdom, kindness of heart and commitment, day in and day out, to work for peace. Now having recently moved away, learning to live in England again, it is both a pleasure and privilege for me to eavesdrop on a further contribution to peacemaking in this collection of papers and to join in their conversation.

And why do I tell you this? Well, in part, I do so because other writers in this volume have introduced themselves as an integral part of their contributions. Having been invited to make comment on what others have said, introducing myself seems both appropriate and polite! But it is also more than that. As material beings we are all located in cultural space somewhere. This is well known on the island of Ireland where history, geography, religion and politics have long been a constituent part of identity. But it is also true for our faith: there is no neutral space from which we learn of God and we do not follow Jesus in a cultural vacuum. And that goes to the heart of what these essays are about. They draw attention to our complex embodiments and ask for self-awareness and community reflection about faith itself.

Of the many rich ideas within this diverse and imaginative collection, I focus on three. I begin with the ever present task of negotiating difference, looking in particular at the matters of space and story, and the relationship between self and other. Next I consider how some contributors have broadened the notion of peace to encompass more than a concentration on resolving the historic conflict on the island of Ireland. Finally, I turn to the originating question of this essay collection; namely, the matter of the tangible contribution of theological studies to peace. Following the tone of the contributors, along the way I raise questions with the intention of continuing the dialogue that the essays have begun.

Negotiating Difference

A recurring theme in the essays is the matter of negotiating between 'self and other', which, as John Peacock mentions, in contexts of conflict means the more emotive 'us and them'. Connected to this negotiation of difference is the idea of space - shared space and, for Eamonn Walls, neutral space; space for hearing each other's stories and experiences. The purpose of this space is to lead to encounters that, in the language of Paul Ricoeur discussed by Amy Daughton, is about recognising the self in the other, although in contrast, as David Masters elucidates with regard to commercialised city centre space, it may be about replacing existing contested identities with a new common one, in this case that of consumer. But often, as Sharon Verwoerd outlines, these spaces are about finding commonalities across existing differences. Space features in the questions asked in the essays about why we have such separated spaces for doing theology; surely there is space for an intentional interdenominational component in theological education, suggests Abigail Sines. The space Jayme Reaves puts forward is one that accepts and even welcomes disagreement. Kevin Hargaden focuses on how faith relates to public space in the light of a rapidly changing wider society which is reconfiguring the way it relates to religious identities. The essays contain some familiar but also some newer thinking about space and negotiating difference.

When it comes to these spaces for encounter, whether literal or metaphorical, I'm not sure that neutrality is possible or even desirable - although I also warm to the notion that there could be somewhere that offers respite or a kind of 'time out' from the demands of negotiating difference, summed up by the colloquialism 'give my head peace'! As already indicated, I think it vital that we expose the myth of a neutral embodiment. It is important to say, however, that while we are all located somewhere, it does not mean in the particularity of the island of Ireland that we have to situate ourselves simply or only with one identifiable group. Our embodiment may be complicated, as Jon Hatch suggests, in the juxtaposition of things not expected to go together. I am also not suggesting that some distance from our own embedded

location is not desirable or possible, or that our self-understanding cannot change. My point is primarily that we always bear in mind our location(s) and thereby avoid what David McMillan calls 'the tendency to a misguided belief in our own objectivity'.

I think the point of the spaces alluded to (that is, across boundaries of difference), by whatever name, is to provide safe opportunities for encounter. What constitutes safety will vary and may surprise; such space may be found on unlikely ground. And safety is not necessarily synonymous with comfort or ease. It does require, however, some measure of trust; a confidence that we are not in danger if we enter this space, that our vulnerability, while it may be exposed, will not be exploited. If churches are to create these spaces, then they will have to demonstrate themselves worthy of such trust. For while it may be that for many there was a time when the trustworthiness of churches was assumed, this is no longer the case. As Máire Byrne outlines so honestly in her essay, the child abuse that was carried out and covered up within the Catholic Church has disturbed any sense of peace that many Catholics had with their church identity. While Máire Byrne's engagement with this reassessment of relationship is a hopeful one, she sees this as a long-term process. So there are no quick fixes to the dissonance of self-perception and belonging now being experienced.

Safe spaces are opportunities whereby it is possible to tell and hear the stories of the island of Ireland. Sharon Verwoerd writes of need for public exploration of opposing stories of conflict to find commonalities, not least to acknowledge in some way the pain and trauma suffered by all. It is, of course, easier to find some commonalities than others, for example, between various victims than between victims and perpetrators of violence, yet even these terms are used in competing narratives differently depending on who is telling the story. Nuances of language are, of course, part of what makes the telling and hearing of stories demanding for all who participate.

While affirming the value of encounters that lead to the recognition of each other's experiences and hence an acknowledgement of what we might hold in common, I wonder what we do with those narratives where commonalities cannot be found or, if they can, which are insufficient to sustain peace. I think this is important because, realistically, we are dealing with contested narratives. So, among our storytelling spaces, could there be something akin to Jayme Reaves' holy rite of disagreement - a space where all are heard even though the voices cannot be harmonised? This would be not so much finding commonalities in our stories as it would be about being inclusive of all stories in the narrative of the island of Ireland, even when those stories conflict. Can we at least agree to everyone's voice being heard? If it is not possible to reconcile how we understand the past, can we deal with it in such a way that it does not prevent the creation of a constructive future? And, as David McMillan asks, how

can theological enquiry encourage churches to take initiatives in expressions of dealing with the past rather than waiting for action from the State?

One of the responses to the 'us' and 'them' dynamic that keeps people in separate spaces with conflicting stories is taken up by John Peacock in his account of some of David Stevens' reflections on the story of the Corrymeela Community. For those who have come across it, the work of textual critic René Girard has been enormously helpful in thinking about a Christian response to the violence associated with the island of Ireland. René Girard sees mimetic (that is, imitated) desire as central to human behaviour; we learn to value things because others value them, we want what others have or want to have, which in turn makes them value or want that same thing even more. Violence is a by-product of mimetic desire that has escalated into a rivalry where that which was valued or wanted ceases to matter and only the conflict remains. A social group gathers around one of the protagonists who unite against the one who is now the weaker party and who becomes the object - or the scapegoat - for the group's aggression thereby enabling the group to prohibit violence within itself. René Girard understands religious rituals to be symbolic substitutes for the actual scapegoat, thereby maintaining the peace of a group or community without committing actual violence. With Christianity in particular, however, he sees the possibility of an end to mimetic violence as we can become imitators of Christ, who took violence upon himself for the sake of others.

I would encourage those who converse with the work of René Girard to add the voice of Grace Jantzen into the conversation. Grace Jantzen argued that violence of itself cannot bring peace, that human flourishing requires creativity and beauty, a celebration of life she termed natality, which is 'the potential for newness and for hope'²; and which she contrasted to a preoccupation with death and violence. Her concern was with the inattention given to creativity and the dominance of violence - that death has displaced beauty - in much of the construction of Western thought. She criticised René Girard's thinking on the basis of its unacknowledged yet common gendered assumptions, namely, that humanity is normatively male and that masculinity involves mastery and therefore rivalry.³ She questioned whether all desire is mimetic and hence originating out of lack, arguing that the desire to create 'bespeaks fullness that overflows, that wants to give of its resources, express itself'⁴; and, importantly for our discussions, that it is this creativity that is needed to bring about peace. I draw attention to her contribution here because it resonates with David Masters' questioning of whether our solutions for violence are 'creative of life and hope rather than provocative of death and destruction' and his suggestion that we 'look for resurrection, for uprisings of life and for new creations, in our search for peace'. Does our inevitable and necessary preoccupation with overcoming violence refract our sensibilities away from creative sources of life and hope?

2. G. Jantzen, J. R. Carrette, and J. Mourny (2009), *Violence to Eternity*. London: Routledge, p. 8.

3. Elsewhere I have argued that gendered understanding is at work in theological concepts of sin and redemption and their impact on debates about human society. See, for example, F. Porter (2010), 'Thinking About Ourselves: Christian Theology and Rights Discourse in Northern Ireland', in D. Tombs (ed), *Rights and Righteousness: Perspectives on Religious Pluralism and Human Rights*. Belfast: NIHRC, pp. 55-60. Available at: [http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/71/Rights_and_Righteousness_\(February_2010\).pdf](http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/71/Rights_and_Righteousness_(February_2010).pdf).

4. G. Jantzen, J. R. Carrette, and J. Mourny (2009), *Violence to Eternity*. London: Routledge, p. 33.

Broadening Peace

In this collection which focuses on the immediacy of the culturally contested context of the island of Ireland it is valuable and healthy to have contributions that witness to the all encompassing reach of peace. Máire Byrne's astute and yet not harsh account of the cultural shift occurring for Catholics in Irish society focuses on the quest for inner peace that will be found in part by being open to global religious encounter. David Masters' absorbing essay, while it grounds peace locally, also reaches globally in its attention to the hidden injustice inherent in modern consumerism. This injustice impacts ourselves as consumers, and many of the producers, for so much of global trading is not fair. There are indications from both Abigail Sines and Jon Hatch that ethnicity, gender and sexuality are all aspects of our personal and corporate embodiment where, in some measure at least, peace is still elusive.

Kevin Hargaden explores how Christians can create peace-enshrining communities in a context where churches are becoming increasingly marginalised in a pluralistic and increasingly secular State. He takes the language of sectarianism and fundamentalism so associated with conflict on the island of Ireland and elsewhere and subverts it away from its dysfunctional meanings into constructive ways of being church. At a first glance, to attempt to term a constructive theology (leaving aside any debate about its substance) as sectarian (and perhaps less so as fundamentalist) seems ridiculous if not offensive. On further thought, however, I think his choice of language is worth some reflection.

Naming a theology of the church as sectarian and fundamentalist is reminiscent of (if not analogous to) the nomenclature 'queer theology'. Queer theology, following queer theory, takes a term of strangeness and oddity, which is also a term of insult, of derogatory naming of particular human sexuality, and turns it into an interrogative stance about marginality and exclusion that encompasses not only differences in human sexuality but all minority interests. Something intended as a shameful term is thus reclaimed as a term that is integral to normalcy as the latter is defined in part by what it rejects. In this sense, queer is not so much about theological identity as it is about positionality, a 'distancing or divergence from what is held as normative'⁵ thereby challenging this normativity to reassess itself.

Something akin to the idea of positionality is evident in the ethics of Stanley Hauerwas (referred to by Kevin Hargaden) who writes, 'the world needs the church because, without the church, the world does not know who it is... The way for the world to know that it needs redeeming, that it is broken and fallen, is for the church to enable the world to strike hard against something which is an alternative to what the world offers.'⁶ While Kevin Hargaden uses the softer language of Miroslav Volf for the interface between church and society, the sectarian ecclesiology he proposes

deliberately and dramatically juxtaposes with the sectarian pathology of conflict. For me, the intriguing thought that his essay raises is: could a church on the island of Ireland ever adopt unashamedly a theology that, regardless of its subversive content, is named sectarian and fundamentalist? And what kind of journey would it have to travel in terms of dealing with distorted human relating to be able to do so?

Theological Studies

While a number of the essays address theological education directly, looking at the content, structure and approach of theological courses and colleges, others do so indirectly, by reminding us that theological study occurs in communities and parishes as well as college classrooms. The contribution of theological studies to peace is not, therefore, a minority or elitist interest, rather it needs to be embedded in our church life. We are reminded too that lived experience, and individual and corporate reflection on that experience, is part of the way we learn and grow.

What I found striking when I was introduced to this project and its focus, was how odd it felt that this question - of how theological studies contribute to peace - should be put to an externally gathered ad hoc group of theology students. In case that sounds somewhat disparaging, let me explain! This is a wonderful collection of essays that I hope will receive the attention it deserves. It is both substantive and hopeful. I applaud giving voice to theology students, especially such a diverse group, and even had such an exercise been carried out before, there would still be purpose in giving this particular generation of students (that is, those currently investing considerable time, concentration and indeed heart to theological study, much of it at postgraduate level) the opportunity to address how such study can contribute to peace. As is important with many matters of faith, each generation must wrestle with, at times reconfigure, and thereby make its own the traditions it receives. The group process whereby contributors could share, debate and develop their ideas in each other's presence has enhanced both the experience and the outcome. This is all good. No, what felt odd to me was that it was not a group of theological educators (in a formal sense) that were coming together to address the question - not even for the first time, let alone as part of ongoing reflection of their theological pedagogy. This absence tells its own story.

Hence, as the contributors so vividly portray, many students have no understanding of religious traditions other than their own, let alone have occasion to engage with people from different traditions. The theology itself so often makes no reference to the contested society in which it is taught (unless, as David McMillan outlines, to rationalize and justify our positions). In a context where religion is enmeshed with political and social identity and conflict, hindrance to living together is, through neglect, built into the way theology is often taught. In so many ways this is

understandable; churches and their colleges are hardly alone in having their energies deployed in other directions, not least for many in the role of pastor to their flocks at times of great distress and disturbance. But while understandable, surely it is time for the rich resources of theology, spirituality and tradition to contribute more to the work of peace?

I am not suggesting that the response is solely to follow an ecumenical path. While ecumenism is embraced by some Christians, for other believers it is considered incompatible with faithfulness. The highly contested nature of ecumenism on the island of Ireland is something that I think a few essay contributors underestimate. Jayme Reaves' reflections on a holy rite of disagreement offer us a glimpse of the possibility of healthy relationships that can hold disagreement, where differences are not worked out. And as wounding as that prospect (of not continuing to strive for agreement) may be to some people, for others it may be that which enables their involvement with different traditions. What other creative, innovative and different ways might there be for people rooted in a particular theology and tradition to communicate and engage with those of a different religious location? Francis Cousins suggests a focus on Scripture as a common resource across traditions, for all claim it as a (if not the only) foundational source for Christian identity and self-understanding.

Earlier in this essay I thought about the part that churches might play in creating safe storytelling spaces that are an integral part of peacemaking. I wonder, now, how far the potential for churches to provide safe spaces along social and political differences is related to their capacity to participate in similar encounters themselves concerning theological and religious differences. Put another way, if we cannot engage in spaces addressing differences of Christian religious tradition and practice, will we know how to host safe spaces for social and political encounters of difference? Alternatively, could it be that for some of us it is easier to facilitate cross-community encounters than it is to participate in inter-church ones? But how authentic are our social/political involvements if we are unable to engage constructively with our religious divergence? And does this matter? I think it does because religious affiliation is enmeshed with national identity and because the language of peace, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation has become an intrinsic part of political discourse while still contested among Christian traditions as to its theological meaning. Church traditions as well as social communities tell different stories.

Without Conclusion

While my essay now concludes, the work of peace does not! Amy Daughton applies philosophical thought in a stunning way at the end of her essay in the statement that peace is an instance that must be repeated time and time again: 'Peace is never achieved in the sense of a final goal.' While she presents this in the abstract with local application as a distinct task still to be done, without doubt for many readers this will resonate with their experience of long years spent working for peace. It also means that there is still plenty of work to be done and plenty of space for theology students and teachers alike.

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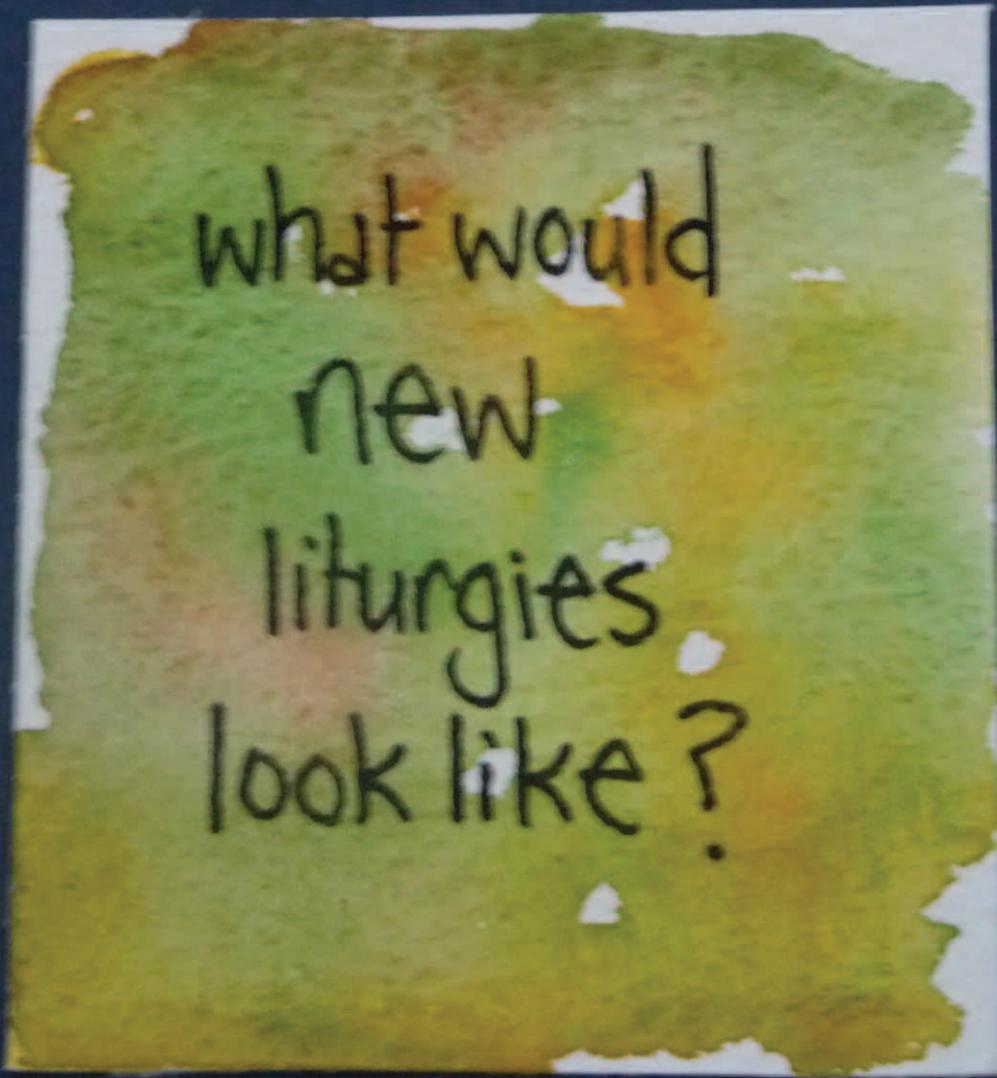
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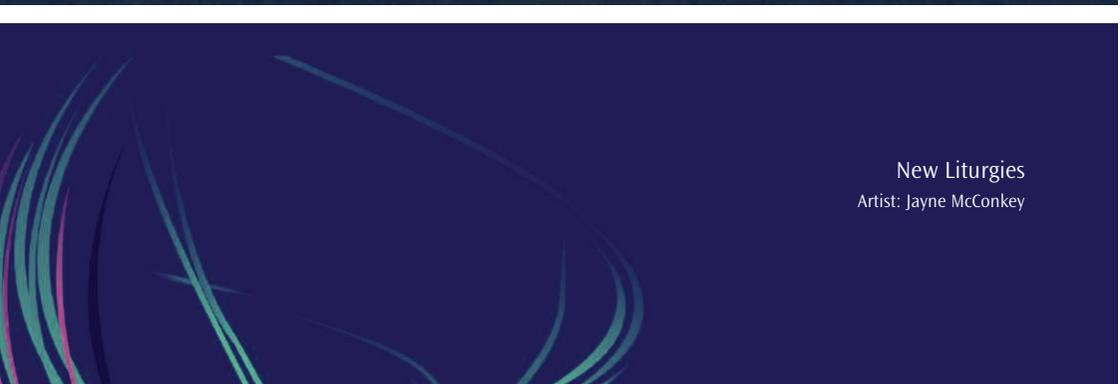
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what would
new
liturgies
look like?



New Liturgies
Artist: Jayne McConkey

Afterword

On the fifteenth of June 2010, the Saville report, investigating the opening of fire in January 1972 by British troops on civil rights marchers in the Bogside area of Derry, which resulted in the immediate deaths of 13 people, was released. The Saville Inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday ran for 12 years and cost almost £200,000,000.

On the sixteenth of June 2010, Protestant church leaders - the Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, Bishop Ken Good; the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, Rev Norman Hamilton and the Methodist Church President Rev Paul Kingston visited Bloody Sunday families in Derry. The joint statement from the leaders stated that a cloud, which had been hanging over the city for almost forty years, had begun to lift. The Saville Report presented a challenge, and an opportunity for new and closer relationships to form within the wider community.

The joint statement ended with “As Christian leaders, we believe that reconciliation is at the very heart of the Christian message.”¹

The event was charged with meaning and powerful gesture. It is true, also, that there was certain risk taken by the Church leaders in making this move to acknowledge the pain and grief of the families.

For the purposes of a short afterword on this Irish Peace Centres Theological Students project, I interviewed four church leaders², and had discussions with them on a number of the themes that came up within the context of the project. When speaking about the events on June 16th 2010, Bishop Harold Miller noted that the motivation for this meeting by the Church Leaders was, most surely, theological. In saying this, he was highlighting the depth of conviction from which each was operating., When asked about the specifics of his theological motivation for this public gesture, the current moderator for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rev. Dr. Norman Hamilton, stated without hesitation that his motivation was based on the justice and truth of God. He noted that injustice had been done, and that the truth had come out in the long-standing inquiry. Therefore he felt that he had a duty to visit the families.

The gesture was not without its risk for the church leaders. Each, in his own way, faced the potential of severe criticism because (on what is both a primal and powerful level) to be seen to acknowledge the pain of the other can be seen as letting one's own side down.

1. Full statement available at the Diocese of Down and Dromore's website: <http://www.downanddromore.org/index.cfm?do=news&newsid=1231&m=5&y=2007>

2. Rev. David Campton (Methodist Church in Ireland), Bishop Harold Miller (Church of Ireland), Bishop Donal McKeown (Catholic Church) and Rev. Dr. Norman Hamilton (Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Moderator 2010/2011)

The visit of Protestant Church leaders to the Bloody Sunday families is an example of the practical demonstration of peace that can come from theological studies.

And yet it is complicated, as has been discussed from various perspectives by the contributors to this book.

Rev. David Campton, former chair of Christian Community Workers Alliance and former convenor of the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church in Ireland noted to me that, from his perspective, peace can be seen as a project on the side, rather than fundamental to the business of the church. He spoke of platforms around Northern Ireland where clergy gathered for a public witness to grief in the wake of the Omagh bomb, but where no prayers were held because of an inability for some ministers of Christian congregations to share the platform with ministers from other Christian congregations.

Catholic Bishop Donal McKeown from the diocese of Down and Connor noted that while peacebuilding and reconciliation are key concepts within the Christian texts, the practice of these concepts can vary from group to group - thus leading to disagreement on the role social engagement should play in mainstream Christian praxis. So, it is clear that there are questions to be asked about how Christians of different perspectives understand the particularities of doctrine. However, in the wake of grief, and with the living memory of conflict in the north of Ireland (and particularly a conflict that has adopted religious language) it seems imperative that there be a clear Theology of Peace from this region.

Each of the Church leaders mentioned certain theologians of peace - David Stevens, Cardinal Daly, Ray Davey, Ken Newell, Fr. Gerry Reynolds, Rev. Ruth Patterson, Glenn Jordan, Duncan Morrow, Johnston McMaster, and highlighted the need for new, contemporary voices of peace who would articulate where theological conviction makes an impact on the road to a deeper and a shared peace.

When asked whether the denominational colleges have a high priority of embedding peace within the theological formation of either lay students, or students for ordination, the response was mixed. Often, the church leaders were quick to criticise their own tradition, pointing to where they could see room for improvement. However, they were quick to recognise that theological students, whether for ordination purposes or not, are far from a homogenous group; thus, the dialogue that happens between theological students can be a fair and representative ground for dialogues that happen in wider society.

It was made clear, though, that a depth of exploration of theological differences where one individual can disagree thoroughly with another, yet without insulting the other, was in need of continued exploration and development. In order to deal with peace, we must deal with difference. In order to look at difference well, we must learn how to engage respectfully with different opinions, readings and understandings of text, history and politics. As well as engaging respectfully, we must learn how to be comfortable with disagreement, and how to argue our points soundly, but not at the expense of the dignity of the 'other'. Some denominations already encourage, or require, students to engage in social projects or cross-denominational engagements as part of their theological formation. This provides practical ways for dialogue with people, or groups of difference to happen within the context of theological formation.

Bishop Harold Miller highlighted that the Churches need to paint a picture of the shared future, which is convincing - not as a strategy document but as a lived reality. For some, he said, this future is almost as frightening as a return to conflict. In this landscape, is it possible that theological studies can be part of the grounded learning that gives individuals the learning, conviction and commitment to a real and practical peace, which can lead to increasing amounts of gestures that give a glimpse of what a peaceful and sustained future together might look like?

The existence of difference and disagreement within theological circles can be seen as a strength, according to Bishop Donal McKeown. He noted that none of us is as smart as all of us, and highlighted a point that all of the Church leaders drew upon - that the surface-level delineation into "conservative" and "liberal" can be more about name-calling or tribal group-formation, than authentic exploration. It can also be detrimental for having authentic and intelligent dialogue about the most practical and tangible matters that affect our society.

It remains with me to wonder what are the grievances and injustices occurring today that will never have the level of inquiry that the Saville Report was able to offer, but that, nonetheless, are aching for a gesture from people of faith, such as that gesture seen on June 16th, 2010. I am hoping that the ongoing projects from the Irish Peace Centres which engage theological students will give depth and capacity for such real and meaningful gestures to take place, and I am hoping that our institutions of theological learning will continue to embed reflection on, and praxis of, the ethics embedded deeply within the sacred texts into the formation of both lay and clerical theological students.



Holy Debate
Artist: Jayne McConkey

Biographies of contributors

Pádraig Ó Tuama grew up in Cork, and following a nomadic decade, settled in Belfast. He currently works as the Faith in Positive Relations fieldworker for the Irish Peace Centres. He has previously worked as poet-in-residence for peacebuilding programmes of the Corrymeela community. With a B.Div from Maynooth, he is currently undertaking MTh studies at Union College, Belfast, on a narrative approach to the gospel texts, particularly those detailing interactions with the marginalised. When he isn't working, he's probably reading, talking, listening to the radio or cooking curries for people he loves.

Kevin Hargaden was born and raised in Leixlip, Co. Kildare. He works in a small Presbyterian church plant in Maynooth, Co. Kildare while also training to be a Presbyterian minister at St. Patrick's College in the town. His interests lie in mission, culture and the theology of economics.

Originally from Hampton, Virginia, **Abigail Sines** has spent time studying and working in such far-flung places as Honolulu, Hawai`i and Beijing, China. Her previous employment with the East-West Centre in Honolulu had her working with groups of journalists and young women leaders, coordinating short-term dialogue and exchange programmes on a wide variety of Asia Pacific issues. Abigail traded the tropical beaches of Hawai`i for the rocky shores of Ireland in order to take up postgraduate studies in theology at Queen's University Belfast. She graduated with her MTh in July 2010. Her dissertation focused on the role of interfaith dialogue in Christian spirituality and her library research was greatly informed by the real-life interfaith dialogue that happened each week while working in the local pizza take-away.

Máire Byrne, from Dundalk, Co. Louth, studied at St Patrick's College, Maynooth and graduated with a PhD in Theology in 2007. Her particular area of interest is the Old Testament and she held the Finlay Fellowship in Theology in the Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy from 2008-2010. She currently teaches Scripture in Maynooth and Milltown.

Sharon Verwoerd is from Brisbane, Australia. She has been a teacher for ten years, during which time she explored community, peacebuilding and spirituality through a range of special roles. As a member of Pace e Bene, an international network whose mission is to foster justice and peace through nonviolent action, she became involved in local reconciliation efforts in Australia. After completing her Masters in Peace & Conflict Resolution, she took up an internship at the Glenree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation in Ireland. Sharon is now Catholic Chaplain at Lagan College in Belfast,

where she works alongside the Protestant Chaplain, Helen Killick. They work together to lead shared prayer and assemblies, provide faith and pastoral support, and actively foster peace and justice in the school community and wider world.

Francis Cousins is Editor of Intercom, which is a pastoral and liturgical resource of the Irish Bishops' Conference and has a strong interest in biblical theology, especially the Synoptic Gospels.

David Masters works for the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), a global fellowship of Christian students. Previously, he studied at the Irish School of Ecumenics in Belfast, where he wrote his dissertation on the role of clowns in building peace. While living in Belfast he also volunteered with Aktivism from the Kitchen Table (AKT), a Corrymeela project.

David McMillan comes from Belfast and has spent over twenty years in pastoral ministry with Baptist churches in Newry and Belfast. He has had experience in a range of community organisations and continues to be involved with various voluntary projects as well as postgraduate research with the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague.

Amy Daughton is an IRCHSS Government of Ireland Scholar in Theology at Trinity College Dublin. Broadly, her work considers intersections of hermeneutics, ethics, and systematic theology. Currently, she is working on Paul Ricoeur's ethical understanding of selfhood and cultures, in dialogue with Thomas Aquinas's theory of analogical thinking; this project intends to furnish resources for models of social cohesion that can address the tensions arising within pluralist societies, between diverse linguistic and memory cultures.

John Peacock studied theology at Union College, and worked as an associate minister with young people and families at Newtownbreda Presbyterian. Working in the mixed area of the Ormeau Road, re-enforced his view that reconciliation is at the heart of the Christian message and churches have a place in challenging prejudice, division and stereotyping and encouraging inclusion and the celebration of diversity. He is married with 2 children at Lagan College. John works at YouthLink: N.I., as Community Relations Manager, we focusing on bringing youth leaders and young people together from diverse church and community backgrounds, to build relationships and help them understand their own identity and that of others.

Jon Hatch is an American/Irish dual citizen raised in the working class suburbs of Newark, New Jersey. He holds a B.A in Music Performance and Biblical Studies, an M. Phil. in Reconciliation Studies, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D in Theology. He has been involved with community development work in North America, Europe, and

Australia and currently does research and resource development, writing and facilitation work with the Irish Peace Centres and the Corrymeela Community. He lives in Belfast with his wife Amy and their two children, Iain and Eilís.

Eamonn Walls from Belfast is proud of his quirky and rather eclectic education. Having gone to a Catholic school in West Belfast, he went on to study theology at the Methodist Edgehill College and the Presbyterian Union Seminary. He is currently studying Cognitive Science at Queen's, and is making plans for future PhD research on the legacy of the Ryan and Murphy Reports in the Catholic Church in Ireland. He also likes playing chess and free rock-climbing, though not at the same time.

Jayne Reaves is a Ph.D candidate in political inter-cultural theology with a thesis specializing in protective hospitality at the Irish School of Ecumenics and is based in Belfast. She hails from gritty, yet genteel, American South but has a penchant for living in post-conflict areas such as Bosnia, Croatia and now Northern Ireland. When not slaving over theological texts and attempts to save the world, she loves cooking, whiling away hours on social media sites, and long walks on the beach.

Fran Porter is a social and theological researcher, writer and teacher with particular interests in socially engaged theology and feminist engagement with Christianity. She has an MSc and PhD in Women's Studies from the University of Ulster, a BA in Theology from the London School of Theology, and is an associate of the Applied Research Centre in Sustainable Regeneration at Coventry University involved with projects in their Faith Communities and Regeneration strand. Fran is author of *It Will Not Be Taken Away From Her: A Feminist Engagement with Women's Christian Experience* (2004, Darton, Longman and Todd); *Changing Women, Changing Worlds: Evangelical Women in Church, Community and Politics* (2002, Blackstaff Press); and *Faith in a Plural Society: The Values, Attitudes and Practices of Churches in Protecting Minority Participation* (2008, CCCI).

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Notes



Notes



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