

### **Chapter III of the Charta Oecumenica By Professor Brendan Leahy, November 2006**

I have been asked to look at the third section in the Charta. Admittedly, this was scheduled for our last meeting and, in a sense, the intervening Inter-Church Meeting itself has rendered my task much easier because it's all been done on that occasion! The title of this third section runs: "Our Common Responsibility in Europe". And that was a theme that emerged at the Inter-Church Meeting.

So I shall limit myself to a few observations. In talking about participating in the building of Europe, the Charta refers to the role of "our faith". A dominant feature of the past fifty years in Europe has been a "purification of faith." In other words, certain forms and practices that Christians followed faithfully in the past now appear no longer essential or, at least, needing to be recast within new wider horizons of faith in the light of both cultural developments within our continent and spiritual renewal in our churches.

This "purification of faith" involves firstly a new leap in faith, a new discovery of God as Love as revealed in the great narrative of biblical revelation.

We need not only a leap in faith, but a leap "of" faith. This means a renewal or a recasting of our very configuration of faith adherence and faith-community living if we want to be present here and now in the "today" of history.

This starts, however, with our own re-evangelisation. Perhaps, we have lived out faith primarily in terms of vertical adherence and obedience in faith to God. Without taking from specific ministries, charisms and vocations, today we are called to practice the obedience and adherence of reciprocal belonging to one another as brothers and sisters of the one Father. Cyprian, writing in the third century, and commenting on the *Our Father*, and dealing precisely with that part that says "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" puts this perspective before us. Yes, he says, we need to forgive because "we are a people made one in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Ontologically through baptism we share in the life of God who is Trinity, three Persons who love another but we are called to render it visible existentially through our life or reciprocal love and forgiveness. We are called not only to believe in the Trinity but to *live* the Trinity. And to learn this together.

Such a "purification of faith" in terms of focus on reciprocal love within our communities and among our communities could provide a humus and cultural support for the developments facing Europe. In the third century Letter to Diognetus we read that "what the soul is in the body, that the Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and the Christians throughout the cities of the world." The Christian "purification of faith" in terms of reciprocal belonging to one another in faith in Christ could be our exercise today of this mission of giving a "soul" to the initiatives of transition period ahead.

Experience of Stuttgart Meeting of ecclesial communities, groups and movements, both Catholic and Protestant in 2004. 10,000 people linked up

together via satellite with other cities around Europe. Idea: a spiritual network throughout Europe offering a "soul" to Europe.

In this sense, there is a particular resonance on this island of s. 8 of the Charta that speaks of churches reconciling peoples and cultures. But also the strengthening and fostering of partnership in church and society between women and men.

The Charta also mentions safeguarding the **creation**. Perhaps this is a theme we could return to. It was very much to the fore in the 1989 Basle meeting and again at Graz. It also involved adopting a lifestyle free of consumerism. It's an invitation to a change of lifestyle.

n. 10 invites us to strengthen community with **Judaism**. With regard to Jews it writes warmly of the unique relationship that links Christians with the people of the Covenant which God has never terminated. And wants us to raise awareness of the deep bond existing between the Christian faith and Judaism, and to support Christian-Jewish co-operation. **Jews**: There are less than 800 Jews in Dublin and (Belfast?) that number is decreasing. Historically and currently, relations with the Jews have been good. There is an active Council for Christians and Jews celebrating 25 years of existence this year. It includes Catholic, Protestant and Jewish representatives and scholars. There is also a Catholic-Jewish Fellowship that aims at furthering the dialogue of life among people. The Jewish Chief Rabbi and president of the Jewish Council in Ireland are members of the *Three Faiths Forum of Ireland*

Perhaps it's something we need to address as an Inter-Church level. After all, the deep bond that exists between the Christian faith and Judaism is one that we are only really awakening to in the past fifty years. And there are treasures to be discovered.

The last 2 sections deal with **other religions** which, as we have said above, is a developing trend. Here in Ireland, other non-Christian faith communities have grown considerably in recent years. Stephen Skuce's recently-published work, *The Faiths of Ireland* (Dublin: Columba, 2006) gives a synthetic overview of its development.

But, of course, we have other religions too in Ireland. Dialogues with which this dialogue is to be sought:

- **Sikhs**. With over 1000 members, the Sikh community has its own Gurdwara in South Dublin. Its leader, Dr. Puri, is very involved in promoting outreach of the Sikh community at many levels within the diocese with an active presence in inter-faith activities.
- **Hindus**. With approximately 1000 Hindus, this community has only recently launched its Vinayaka Temple. Hindu representatives attended the March 2002 Together for Peace initiative organised by the diocese.
- **Buddhists**. There are a number of Buddhist centres in Dublin. The Dublin Buddhist Centre is part of a world-wide movement of Buddhist centres called *The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order*. It sent a representative recently to a meeting organised by the diocese to

pursue the possibility of setting up a chapter of Religions for Peace (WCRP) in Ireland.

- **Bahá'í** has been present for some decades in Ireland. The Irish Bahá'ís organized the first of five international conferences in the world in 1982. They are represented at various state occasions. The diocesan contact with this community is not well developed, though have been friendly contacts on various occasions.

n. Cultivating relations with **Islam**.

Obviously, the community that has grown most is the Islamic community. It has grown much since the first students came in the 1950s and 1960s. It is estimated that Muslims now number over 30.000 on the whole of the Island with many of these coming from Pakistan, Liberia and Algeria, mostly belonging to the Sunni tradition although the Shi'ite Mosque in Milltown, Dublin, attests to a presence of the other major Islamic strand.

The first mosque in Ireland was opened in Harrington Street, Dublin in 1975 with the first purpose built one in 1986 in Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo. In 1983 the Presbyterian Church in Donore Avenue, Dublin was sold to Muslims and soon became the largest mosque in Ireland. There are also mosques in Limerick, Cork, Galway, Waterford and Cavan with Belfast having its Islamic Centre established in 1977 and the current mosque opening in Wellington Park in 1986. Of course, apart from the "official" mosques, we need to keep in mind that any house where Muslims gather to pray can be considered a mosque.

The Islamic Cultural Centre, Clonskeagh, Dublin (financed largely by the Maktoum family, rulers of Dubai) is by now the largest Islamic unit on the island. Anyone who has driven past it cannot but admire its impressive architecture. One of the largest in Europe, this cultural centre opened in 1996. Its mosque has a capacity of 1,000 worshippers and in addition it has an administration centre, shop, restaurant, meeting rooms and accommodation units. Since 1993 the Muslim National School is also located on this Clonskeagh site with a second Muslim school in Cabra, north Dublin while plans for a Muslim secondary school are also in hand.

Significantly, the European Council for Fatwa and Research, a foundation established in 1997 in London by the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe, is based in Dublin. It strives to bring together Islamic scholars who live in Europe; unify the jurisprudence views between them in regards to the main *Fiqh* (Islamic law) matters, and issue collective fatwas that meet the needs of Muslims in Europe, and in the light of the Shariah solve their problems and regulate their interaction with the European communities. Sheikh Hussein Mohammed Halawa, based in Clonskeagh is the General Secretary of this Council.

Any assessment of Islam in Ireland - and this is also probably true of other religions - must take account of the cultural differences between Arab, Asian and African Muslims. Economic, educational and social differences also exist among Muslims. Stephen Skuce reminds us that as well as a significant Sunni-Shi'a distinction there are "language differences, liberal and secular

interpretations [of Islam], all resulting in Muslim communities rather than community" (p. 59).

The Charta Oecumenica recommends we cultivate relations with Islam. "We would like to intensify encounters between Christians and Muslims and enhance Christian-Islamic dialogue at all levels".

Forums we have are: *Three Faiths Forum of Ireland* and the *Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum* (part of Interfaith network of UK) serving it claims serves "both as a national and a local body". British Government's Home Office has produced a good booklet on faith relations - worth getting. Perhaps Inter-Church Office could get it.

In summary, the third section of the Charta echoes the Gospel's called "blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9) and "hope..."so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13). It promotes an outreach that is universal that extends beyond our island to lift up our eyes onto European and world horizons and to recognise that if Jesus died for everyone, then all peoples, including those of other cultures and faiths, are to be within our outreach. No one can be a stranger to us.