

Recommendations

of the

Report of the Working Party

on

Sectarianism (1993)

Sectarianism: A Discussion Document is now out of print.

The working definition of sectarianism used in the Report is the following:

"Sectarianism is a complex of attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and structures in which religion is a significant component, and which (I) directly, or indirectly, infringes the rights of individuals or groups, and/or (ii) influences or causes situations of destructive conflict".

Still available are the following:

Roots of Sectarianism by Dr. Joe Liechty £1.95

(a document commissioned by the Working Party)

What the Bible Says About Sectarianism by John Lampen £1.50

The Moving Beyond Sectarianism Project of the Irish School of Ecumenics has continued the discussion and reflection on the subject. A report (including the proceeding of a major Conference in June 1997 is due later in 1998. The Project is based in the Inter-Church Centre.

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The Structure of Sectarian Attitudes

The structure of sectarian attitudes in our society is like a pyramid. At the apex are the actions of the 'mad dog' - the attacks at the Milltown Cemetery and the Darkley church, which are condemned by almost everyone in the layers beneath. Indeed it is a feature of this pyramid that people at each level, when it comes to the crunch, disclaim responsibility for the words and actions of the layer above. But such atrocities grow out of the hatred expressed in sectarian rioting and attacks on neighbours and their homes, simply because of their religious beliefs and political opinions. This level of bigotry is sometimes condemned by the main paramilitary groups, who claim to be fighting to advance a cause or defend a community - but many of their actions have had a sectarian character, and it is easy to see how they provide a model and justification for the more random layer above them. The paramilitary level in its turn rests upon that of the people who use platform, pulpit or the pages of the press to express bigoted and inflammatory sentiments. True, they often condemn illegal violence, but at the same time they stir up hatred. When one side denounces the police and army as "murderers" and the other demands that the security forces should operate without the restraints of law, they encourage others to take matters into their own hands. And this level could not survive without the tacit support of many 'ordinary, decent people' who have some sympathy for their views. Such people do not want to appear bigoted, but they are ambivalent about the use of force; they encourage by vote, religious view and private opinion the layer above them. Such people would be horrified to be told they are connected with the extreme violence at the top of the pyramid. Yet it is not hard to see how each individual stone supports the total structure.

An evangelical Christian youth worker recalls how he used to spit on the ground whenever he saw a priest or nun. "My conversion experience changed me - but only from an embittered loyalist to a nice unionist. My first real encounters with Catholics at college across the water undermined my faith, by convincing me that so much I had learnt was false - was there anything left to believe?" When he returned to work with young people in Belfast, he found he had to confront his own attitudes to violence. He

understood loyalist violence, because he could always summon up a justification for it; but he did not want to accept that young republicans were loveable people. He knew that he wanted to follow Christ, not 'tribal gods'. But learning how to live the choice was a long road, with many stumbling blocks. The confirmation that it was the right road came with the Ormeau Road murders of November 1991. "I had to go to see the families of the victims, since I knew them, but I was afraid to go because I was aware that my tribe had done it. I could never have foreseen the reception I got. I was so enriched by the way I was integrated into that community in their pain. While I was with them there was an unending flow of visits, letters, flowers and prayers from Protestants like myself. I am convinced that it was this which strengthened the Ormeau Road Catholics' determination that there should be no reprisals for the murders."

WAYS FORWARD & RECOMMENDATIONS

We have said that sectarianism is a religious problem but that it is not only a religious problem. Sectarianism gains its peculiar virulence because it involves not only religion, but religion combined with a tangle of other factors - for example, culture, politics, economics and national identity. Therefore, there are a number of inter-related issues to be considered when dealing with the Northern Ireland 'problem':

- there is the central constitutional problem: What should be the political context for the people of Northern Ireland? Integration with Britain? A united Ireland? Independence? etc. And the associated political problems of: Who will have power over whom or what? Or how can people be protected from other people having power over them? Or how are power and responsibility to be shared?
- there is a continuing problem of social and economic inequalities, especially in the field of employment.
- there is a problem of cultural identity and of how cultural differences are dealt with.
- there is a security problem; people continue to be killed and maimed. How is violence to be contained and overcome? How can an acceptable system of law and order be found for which both communities will take responsibility?
- there is a human rights problem; there are issues concerning adequate protection from discrimination; the administration of justice and effective mechanisms of public accountability in regard to the security forces and their actions.
- there is a problem of day-to-day relationships of people, in neighbourhoods, between neighbourhoods, in organisations, between organisations, etc.
- there is a problem of religious difference.

The Northern Ireland 'problem' is embedded in a wider British/Irish context and therefore, the character of Southern Irish society and the British-Irish relationship are part of the 'problem' too.

All these issues affect each other. All have to be dealt with. Therefore, we suggest ways forward and present specific recommendations in a number of different areas: (1) The Churches; (2) The Constitutional and Governmental Level; (3) Sectarianism and Violence; (4) Law and Order; (5) Socio-Economic Inequality; (6) Local Councils; (7) Promoting Integrated Living; (8) Education; (9) North-South Links; (10) The Republic of Ireland; (11) Home, Street and Local Community; and (12) Dealing Constructively with Differences.

(1) The Churches

It is vital that we find ways out of the fear, rivalry, sense of superiority, and enmity which have historically characterised relations between the Churches and most Christians in Ireland. The task of reconciliation, and not the maintenance of boundaries, is central for us in Ireland - for the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. What has happened in Northern Ireland society calls us to a profound change of heart (*metanoia*). It calls us to face reality and abandon our myths, to accept our part of the responsibility for what has happened and find new ways of living together.

Specific Actions

Specific actions by Churches and individual Christians might be to:

- avoid expressions, judgements and actions which do not represent the reality of other Churches and Christians with truth and fairness;
- avoid thinking in stereotypes but seek to understand the reality of the person from another tradition. This will often involve becoming more accurately informed about their Church, its self-understandings, teachings, beliefs, worship and practices.
- understand and evaluate the significance of the common ground as well as the differences between us. Not all differences of belief and practice are equally important or necessarily incompatible with a fuller unity of Christians. Particularly we need to separate

those differences which have to do with differences of Christian belief from those based on Britishness or Irishness or political aspiration. Ultimate loyalty is owed to God alone who is beyond all our particular identities and divisions.

- refuse to use politics or the State to sustain religious identity.
- seek to understand what messages we give through our actions and words to the other community, e.g. over paramilitary funerals or Orange services. Are these the messages we want to give? If not, what can we do to change this? How can we express our understanding of what we are doing to the other community? Is our religious tradition being represented to others by its most extreme and vocal voices?
- understand the fears of the other tradition and seek to act in such a way as to remove, or at least mitigate, those fears. Even though we may feel these fears to be unreal or exaggerated, they are part of the problem for everyone and will continue to be part of the problem until they are acknowledged and allayed. For instance there is a significant Protestant fear of the Roman Catholic Church. How is this to be dealt with by Roman Catholics?
- hear and acknowledge the hurts of the other tradition. This does not necessarily mean an acceptance of that community's interpretation of their hurt but an acknowledgement that it does feel that a real grievance has been suffered. Do Protestants need to acknowledge the hurt of Roman Catholics for what happened to them and their Church during periods of Irish history and up to the present? Do Roman Catholics need to acknowledge Protestant hurt regarding the operation of its regulations on mixed marriage?
- examine our own tradition to see what particular responsibility it bears for what has happened;
- be prepared to repent for what our tradition has done wrong and seek forgiveness;
- seek as far as possible to remove, or at least mitigate, some of the adverse **social** consequences of theological or doctrinal differences (e.g. over mixed marriage or attitudes to the Roman

Catholic Church).

- work together on a theology of dealing with differences and/or the theology of reconciliation. Such theologies might facilitate ways of living together and overcoming differences.
- cooperate on projects for the common good, according to conscience. If we do not do things together the impetus of the forces of division will automatically proclaim another message - namely, solidarity with our own community.
- meet across denominational boundaries to share together our experiences of the on-going work of Christ in our personal lives; the discovery that someone of another tradition may be closer to "life in the Holy Spirit" than I am may lead to a reassessment of what I think about doctrinal differences.
- pray in our parishes and congregations, and together, for the healing of our divisions.

Leadership

Church leadership has a particular responsibility to encourage and initiate necessary changes in their denomination, to be agents of reconciliation, to support change in society while maintaining a proper distinction between the religious and the political - it is not for the Church to propose particular political solutions or support political arrangements - and to encourage and promote education about and respect for other Christian traditions. Church leaders and structures need to provide more information about the existing areas of inter-Church cooperation.

One of the most important tasks for leadership is to help Church members see that to live with God is to take risks and that the improvement of community relationships is an urgent task.

Lay People and Reconciliation

It is vital that there are more lay people who will take active reconciliation seriously, who will be agents of healing and builders of bridges in their neighbourhoods, and who show in their lives that "God is a God of Peace" (*Rom. 16: 20*). The situation in Ireland could be transformed if sufficient numbers of Christians were to undertake work for reconciliation and imaginatively work for peace and healing. At the same time we acknowledge

those who are already doing this in their local situations, quietly, humbly, every day, often in the face of discouragement, apathy or hostility.

They need to be supported.

Actions by Parishes and Congregations

- Bridge building groups can be developed with other local Churches.
- Cooperative programmes of charitable/social work can be developed with other local Churches.
- Pastors/priests/ministers can develop relationships and friendships across the religious divide, e.g. in clergy fellowships. If there is a crisis in an area that increases community tension, such relationships can often be very useful in defusing the trouble. Clergy can attend funerals, condemn the use of violence - joint condemnations are particularly powerful - and reassure the victim's community that such actions are not condoned by the other community.

Training for Ministry

A more developed ecumenical dimension in the training for ministry is vitally important. Those being trained need to learn about, and encounter, other Christian traditions, and study the history and theology of inter church relations in the 20th century.

Mixed Marriage

It is in the area of mixed marriage that the unresolved differences between the Churches are most acutely and personally felt. Since Vatican II there have been considerable changes for the better. The Churches increasingly co-operate to deal with the pastoral issues involved - joint preparation of the couples has been possible in some places. An Inter-Church Standing Committee on Mixed Marriage has been set up to monitor the situation. Some Churches have appointed clergy to take particular responsibility in this area. More changes are, however, required for the sake of the couples involved and for credible ecumenical witness. There is a need for better support and understanding throughout the Churches for mixed marriage couples and their associations.

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Young People

The development of cross-community and inter-denominational programmes for young people from the Churches is important. We welcome the creation of Youth Link: Northern Ireland by the four major Churches in Northern Ireland.

Working for Peace and Justice

Working for peace and justice are essential expressions of the Gospel - not optional extras. Authentic Christian living requires that we attempt to bring the values of the Kingdom into this violent world.

Since it is the Churches' belief that violence is not a way forward to establish peace with justice in Northern Ireland, it is incumbent upon them to: encourage active exploration of non-violent methods, support the work of peace and reconciliation organisations, encourage members to participate actively in the political process and, if necessary, have dialogue with paramilitaries.

Exhortations against violence and paramilitaries, while necessary, are not enough. A number of things could be done by Churches to counter the worst effects of paramilitarism:

- a much higher commitment to work with prisoners and their families, giving emotional, spiritual and perhaps practical support;
- Church members finding out about the problems in the area where they worship and trying to address them, working if possible in partnership with other groups in the community.

Because issues relating to law and order and human rights so often pull us apart in Northern Ireland, there is a particular value in working together on them, if possible.

Dealing with Contentious Issues

Polite avoidance of, and tacit understandings about, divisive issues often operate within parishes and congregations. Church leadership and central Church structures have a role in drawing up guidelines on contentious issues and supporting those who take a stand for positive change. Ordinary members of congregations and parishes can also give vital support.

(2) The Constitutional and Governmental Level

The experience of other divided societies has highlighted the following as being important in dealing successfully with ethnic, linguistic or religious tensions;

- a general respect for human rights and the rule of law;
- the capacity of leaders and the willingness of political parties to compromise and co-operate, with majorities adopting concessive rather than majoritarian approaches, and minorities taking up accommodating rather than separatist positions. This also requires communities who will give their support to such political leaders and parties;
- institutional devices to protect the different groups. These have included political devices, e. g. powersharing and the devolution of power to small communities and protection for cultural and religious identities.

Therefore we would suggest that the following general principles should apply:

- "It is the responsibility of Government to protect human life and to uphold the political, economic and social rights of both Nationalists and Unionists without exception. "
- the acceptance by States of each other's sovereignty and of secure and recognised frontiers between them, and an unqualified renunciation of territorial claims upon each other. Change should only take place with the consent of the people concerned.
- the two communities are entitled to equal respect and equal treatment.
- willingness to treat other communities with the same fairness and concern for their rights as one expects for one's own. (This is an application of the Golden Rule of *Man. 7:13* "Treat others as you would like them to treat you").

We make the following two specific recommendations:

- the introduction of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Such a measure should give explicit positive recognition in our constitutional and legal system to respect for basic human rights and freedoms.
- the need for government departments and public bodies to monitor the **impact of their policies** as between the two communities.

(3) Sectarianism and Violence

Sectarianism, enmity, conflict and violence follow each other round in a vicious circle. We need to tackle the sources of sectarianism. And we need an end to violence. Violence destroys people. It destroys trust between communities, drives them apart and increases sectarianism. Violence is a lie which leads into a physical and moral wilderness. In our belief violence is not the way to establish peace with justice in Northern Ireland. Therefore, we affirm our support of the following conclusion of the *Violence in Ireland* Report:

... that whatever historical explanations there may be for attitudes taken up by various groups in Ireland and without prejudice to any legitimate political aim there is absolutely no justification for the campaigns of violence that have characterised the situation in recent years.²

We also believe that much more attention requires to be given to the needs of the victims of violence.

(4) Law and Order

The lack of consensus in Northern Ireland about the constitutional position is most acutely seen in the two communities' attitudes to, and experiences of, the forces of law and order and the criminal justice system. It is in this area where there is most disagreement between the communities, where people's emotions are at their rawest, and where feelings of fear and threat and lack of confidence are at their most acute. Clearly political arrangements must be found to which both communities can give their assent, which provide the possibility of security of life and property, and where the security forces are fully supported and accountable. In the interim, however, order needs to be maintained and human rights protected for all. A major challenge for us all in Northern Ireland is to take responsibility both for order and society and for the protection and preservation of human rights. These issues are crucial to any political agreement between the

communities.

We believe that the following are important principles in the area of law and order:

- the State should subscribe to the rule of law as expressed in recognised International Standards in regulating the conduct of all persons, including law enforcement agencies. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person.
- the State has the right and duty to enforce the law fairly and equitably and maintain order, in accordance with the rule of law. In so doing, the security forces should use only as much force as is strictly necessary (the principle of proportion) and only against those believed to be breaking or threatening to break the law (the principle of discrimination). the law must be just and must apply to all equally and to be seen to be just and to apply equally.
- it is the duty of a State to protect the life of all persons within its jurisdiction without exception.
- individuals and organisations are, and should be, entitled to pursue their political aspirations. They should do so by lawful and peaceful means.
- individuals and organisations should seek to uphold the law and cooperate with the security forces in the lawful execution of their duties. They should also be prepared to condemn illegal actions by the security forces.

Three fundamental guidelines for legislators dealing with paramilitary violence in a divided society are the following:

- that any derogation from the ordinary law must be shown to be strictly necessary to the fair and effective administration of justice;
- that it must be accompanied by special safeguards to prevent abuse and maintain public confidence; and
- any such derogation must be regularly and effectively reviewed.

In the light of these principles we would suggest that consideration be given to the following, in order to enhance the protection of human rights and public confidence in the security forces:

- ensuring police and army complaints procedures which are transparently independent;
- speedy public investigation into major disputed killings and other controversial incidents involving the security forces. In the instances where this has been done the benefits in enhanced credibility and in increased public confidence have been substantial;
- better methods of dealing with alleged misuse of lethal force by members of the security forces in so-called 'shoot-to-kill' cases;
- ensuring that the powers of arrest and interrogation are not used for general intelligence gathering; they should only be used where there is reasonable suspicion that a particular person has been involved in serious criminal activity;
- greater safeguards in the interrogation of suspects;
- the urgency and necessity of encouraging and facilitating the increased recruitment of more Catholics to the police;
- the need to keep the 'normal' policing and counter-paramilitary roles as separate as possible;
- a continual review of the balance between security and the needs of community relations so that the impact of security actions on communities is constantly taken into account. Community Police Liaison Committees could have an important role here. Community relations training for members of the security forces is also very important.

Marches and Processions

While we respect people's rights to affirm what they stand for and to express their cultural, political and religious identities, we believe that the maintenance of inter-community harmony should be given a higher priority than the assertion of a right to parade along a particular route.

(5) Socio-Economic Inequality

We are of the view that discrimination on grounds of religion is abhorrent and that equality of opportunity is everyone's entitlement.

Fair Employment

There is to be a review of the 1989 Fair Employment Act in 1994. At that time it will be clearer what the Act has achieved in terms of altering imbalances in employment between the communities. It may be that new and tougher measures will be required, in the light of the review of the working of the Act, which will seek to identify and remove barriers to equality of opportunity in employment and education, to change the culture and ethos of organisations and to develop better management practices. If so, the Churches should actively support the necessary changes in the law.

Targeting Social Need

Social disadvantage is a major factor in the continuing violence and the persistence of differentials between the two communities is central to the continuing divisions. Improving education and training and offering people the possibility of employment in areas of deprivation could do much to improve the quality of many people's lives and reduce sectarianism. There is a need to strengthen the Targeting Social Needs (TSN) Programme in terms of defining the Programme satisfactorily and in ensuring that adequate resources are devoted to dealing with social disadvantage in both communities and to altering differentials between them.

(6) Local Councils

The creation of trust and better relations at local level is of vital importance and could help to provide some of the foundations for a political settlement. Therefore, we support and encourage the development of (a) power and responsibility sharing between constitutional political parties and (b) Council Community Relations Programmes.

(7) Promoting Integrated Living

Given the realities of segregation in Northern Ireland as documented in Appendix I we need to encourage ways of integrated living, in the workplace, in organisations, streets and communities. Specifically we recommend that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive should be encouraged to positively develop mixed housing estates. There should be

genuine opportunities for those who wish to live in religiously mixed public housing areas to do so.

(8) Education

We believe that the following principles should apply as far as practicable: the right of parents to choose an appropriate education for their children (e.g. denominationally controlled schools or integrated schools or Irish medium schools);
equality of opportunity and treatment should be provided for all pupils;
equality of funding for all schools;
there is an obligation to ensure that schools are run so as to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among different groups.

We welcome the introduction of Education for Mutual Understanding as part of the curriculum of schools in Northern Ireland and the promotion of programmes of contact between schools. To teach about other traditions in really human terms and to bring young people into new relationships with those from other communities can bring educators (and other people involved in community relations work) into contact with communal fears and tensions. There is a need to support teachers (and others involved in such work). There is also a need to develop new models of bringing people together and to disseminate good practice.

It would be valuable if programmes aimed at improving the understanding and the relationships between people of different cultural traditions in Ireland were further developed in the Republic's schools. Changes in the curriculum of the Republic's schools are currently being discussed and a Green Paper has been issued. This is an opportune time for active consideration of this proposal.

As the Churches have a significant role in education they have a particular responsibility in promoting education for mutual understanding and lessening community division.

(9) North-South Links

The depth of misunderstanding and lack of contact between North and South is very large. There needs to be much more face to face contact between people from the two parts of the island. This could be done at the

level of Churches, professional groups, voluntary organisations, schools, youth groups, etc. Greater trade and economic cooperation would also be valuable. The increasing importance of the European Community may facilitate these developments and give North and South a context within which to work together.

(10) The Republic of Ireland

In the context of the protection of minorities generally we believe that a review of the inadequacies and gaps in constitutional and legislative provision is now required. In particular, religious discrimination, other than by the State, is nowhere explicitly outlawed in the Constitution. We believe that it would now be appropriate for the Republic to make some specific provision for the outlawing of religious discrimination more generally. Such legislation would be an important symbol of an open and non-discriminatory society.

(11) Home, Street and the Local Community

The home, street and the local community - particularly the home - are important in the transmission of sectarian attitudes. Conversely they can be vital in the promotion of the respect for others, tolerance and nonsectarianism.

These are some of the things we can do:

- We should always insist on respect for other people's religious and political beliefs in the family home.
- Talk with our children about the various Education for Mutual Understanding programmes happening in their school, finding out their opinions on them, and perhaps learning from the programmes ourselves. We can encourage and support teachers involved in such work.
- Seek to understand the other community's views of the situation, how they feel about life, their hopes and fears about the future. Other people see things differently to us and that is part of life, part of its richness. It need not be a threat.
- Challenge sensitively stereotypes of the other community.

- Change our usual habits, e.g. on patronising certain shops, only using certain doctors or lawyers.
- Get to know people from another tradition.
- Join an organisation which actively seeks to increase cross-community understanding and co-operation.
- If an attack or a murder occurs in our local area show sympathy to the victim's family and community. Such a gesture shows not only support for the family involved, but also that there are people in our ^{community} who do not support such actions.
- We can seek to ensure that the organisations to which we belong are open to people from other traditions as far as possible and encourage them to be sensitive to venue, use of symbols, flags and emblems, ethos, staffing, composition of management committee, etc. We can seek to gain an understanding of the other community by visits, meetings, etc. We can join together with others to deal with common problems.

(12) Dealing Constructively with Differences

Differences have often been dealt with by avoidance (polite or otherwise) or by making people fit in (sometimes subtly and sometimes through overt pressure). Unease, fear and threat are often present, but unspoken, in workplace, organisations, places, etc. where people of different traditions are together. We need to find more constructive ways of dealing with differences.

When people meet openly and speak freely, each `side' might begin to question the way things have been `normally' done. This happens best when trust has developed and we know that we belong together, even in our differences.

Clear policies, structures, agreements, procedures and rules are important when dealing with divisive issues, e.g. flags and emblems, sectarian incidents. These help to reduce and dissolve some of the fears which are around and give support to those who have to take responsibility to deal with difficult issues. They also, at the same time, put the responsibility on the organisation as a whole. It is the organisation's policies, structures, agreements, procedures and rules, not one individual's.

The law is also important, e.g. in Fair Employment, because it entrenches commitment and objectives, creates structures and clarifies responsibilities and expectations.

However, it is not just a question of enforcing and promoting equality of opportunity. We have to get to grips with barriers between people, distrust and prejudice. The values of tolerance and respect for difference have to be actively promoted. We need programmes of education for mutual understanding and in community relations for adults and for all sorts of organisations - not just for children in schools.