



THE IRISH
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
1923 -1983

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FORE WORD

This pamphlet has been produced to commemorate the sixtieth Jubilee of the Irish Council of Churches.

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John M. Barkley.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What is the Irish Council of Churches?

'The Irish Council of Churches is constituted by Christian Communion in Ireland willing to join in united efforts to promote the spiritual, physical, moral and social welfare of the people and the extension of the rule of Christ among all nations and over every region of human life.'

Who are the Members of the I. C. C. ?

The Church of Ireland, the Lutheran Church in Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Moravian Church, the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Religious Society of Friends, and the Salvation Army.

May other Churches join the I.C.C. ?

'Applications for membership from Churches desiring to participate in the Council shall be considered and determined by the Council normally on the recommendation of the Executive Committee.'

What is the origin of the I. C. C. ?

Its origin was in the desire of the Churches, in obedience to Jesus Christ, to give more effective witness to the Kingdom of God and better guidance of the community towards the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ'.

CHAPTER 2

The beginnings in the Joint-Committees, 1911-22

Up to the 20th century each of the Churches in Ireland lived unto itself. There was no such thing as Inter-Church relations. Then in 1904 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and the Conference of the Methodist Church exchanged deputations at their annual meetings. The following year a joint-committee of the two Churches was formed 'to confer from time to time on matters of common interest'.

The General Assembly, in 1910, affirmed that the union of the Evangelical Churches in Ireland 'is an ideal which is to be kept before all Christian people and for which they should earnestly pray', and set apart Sunday, 6th November, as 'a special day of brotherly kindness and cooperation in all branches of the Christian Church in Ireland and for the removal of all hindrances to this spirit', and appointed a committee 'to collaborate with a similar committee of the Church of Ireland or any other Evangelical Church'. On 18th October, 1911, the Joint Committee appointed by the General Synod and the General Assembly held its first meeting in the Sackville Hall, Dublin. Its purpose was 'to encourage the cultivation of friendly relations between the two churches, and to co-operate in philanthropic, social, and religious work as far as such co-operation may be found feasible'. Meanwhile, of course, the Presbyterian-Methodist joint-committee continued its activities although functioning separately.

In 1911, Ireland had not been partitioned, and there was a single administration and legislature at Westminster. This made concerted action in regard to legislative proposals simpler than today. Among early social problems discussed were temperance, national insurance, industrial schools, and the problem of mixed marriages arising from the promulgation by Pius X of the *Ne temere* decree in 1908.

This decree had a significant ecumenical impact in that public meetings of protest against it were organised in Dublin and Belfast. These were attended by Anglicans, Presbyterians, Non-Subscribing Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, and others. Indeed, these

meetings are probably the first example of united action by all the Protestant Churches in Ireland.

The principal successes of the Joint-Committee were in the fields of education in relation to Industrial Schools, having temperance made a subject of teaching in National Schools, and in protesting 'against the inadequacy of the grant provided under "the Duke Scheme" for the teachers of National Schools in Ireland' and its 'demand that the full amount claimed by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland should be provided, so that teachers in Irish Schools may receive grants fully equivalent to those provided for teachers in English and Scottish Schools'. Further, some of its representations had a considerable influence on the Matrimonial Causes Bill and on the Criminal Law Amendments Bill.

In its advocacy of temperance, the Joint-Committee arranged for a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, dated March 15th, 1915, signed on behalf of the various religious Denominations in Ireland by Cardinal Logue, the Archbishop of Armagh, the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Vice-President of the Methodist Church 'and pressed upon the Government the urgent need of immediate action'. From this it is evident that, although its membership consisted only of representatives of the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches, the Joint-Committee was prepared to co-operate with the Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches. What is even more important is that their appointing Bodies were satisfied that this should be so.

It, also, dealt with problems involving inter-church relations. The General Assembly asked it 'to arrange if possible for the mutual recognition (1) of the Status of Communicants passing over on Marriage to the other Church, (2) of discipline, and (3) of the Ecclesiastical Status of members of either Church especially on a change of Ministry'. The second of these referred principally to the celebration of baptism 'to prevent the passing from the jurisdiction of one Church to that of the other of those who may be notorious evil livers or the subjects of discipline', and the third 'desired that the Ministers of each Church in parochial work should properly observe the rights of the other Church and in no case, by pastoral visitation or otherwise, invite or induce the adherents of one of the Churches to attend the ministrations of the other'. Decisions on such questions, of course, were a matter for the Churches. The Joint-Committee could take no decision on such issues, but it did provide an opportunity for them to be discussed.

It, also, discussed joint action in evangelisation and in the raising of 'funds for Foreign Missions'. The former led to a measure of cooperation in some areas, but the latter was found to be impracticable on legal grounds. One minute states it was 'not found practicable to carry

out schemes of co-operation in some of the matters originally brought before the Committee'. This, however, should be kept in perspective. The main fruit of the years 1911-22 was the establishing of friendships and the promotion of understanding. This enabled the Churches to ride the storm caused by the difficulties which arose during the decade 1925-1935, when Church Union negotiations between the Presbyterians and Methodists and the Anglicans and Presbyterians broke down.

When one takes into consideration the difficulties of the period -the 1914-18 World War, the 1916 Rising, Partition and the unsettled state of the country-and makes due allowances, the contribution made by the Joint-Committees to the welfare of society was quite considerable. Church unity itself, though this hope is explicitly set forth in the General Assembly's resolution which led to the Joint-Committee being formed, may have made little progress, but the friendships made were important for the future.

CHAPTER 3

The United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communion in Ireland, 1923-66.

On 11th April, 1920, the Joint-Committees considered a resolution from the General Assembly suggesting the formation of a Council at which 'consultations could take place upon great moral and spiritual questions, and decisions be arrived at, making for more effective witness to the Kingdom of God and better guidance of the community towards the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ'.

As the establishment of Councils of Churches was on the agenda of the Lambeth Conference of that year, it was considered 'advisable to postpone any decision on the subject pending possible action by the Conference'. Lambeth recommended 'that, wherever it has not already been done, Councils representing all Christian Communion should be formed within such areas as may be deemed most convenient, as centres of united effort to promote the physical, moral, and social welfare of the people, and the extension of the rule of Christ among all nations and over every region of human life'.

In 1921, the General Synod and the General Assembly passed resolutions recommending 'the formation of a United Council of the Christian Churches in Ireland', and other Churches were invited to co-operate. As a result, the United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communion in Ireland, consisting of the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church, the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, the Moravian Church, the Congregational Union, and the Society of Friends, was formed in 1922, meeting for the first time 'in its fully organised form' on 23rd January, 1923. Its Constitution said,

1. The Council shall consist of representatives of Christian Communion in Ireland willing to join in united efforts 'to promote the physical, moral, and social welfare of the people, and the extension of the rule of Christ among all nations and over every region of human life'.
2. The representatives shall be appointed by the governing bodies of the Churches Other Churches may join if deemed eligible by the Council

....

4. An Executive Committee, as representative as possible, shall be appointed ...
 5. As soon as practicable Local Councils shall be constituted in the principal centres of the population.
 6. Subjects such as the following: Public Morals, Education, Temperance, Social Welfare, Industrial Relations, etc . . . may be committed to the Executive Committee to be dealt with, as instructed by the Council. The Committee may initiate consideration of a subject, and submit proposals thereon to the Council.
 9. No amendment to this Constitution shall be valid unless approved by the governing bodies represented in the Council.
- The work of the Council is perhaps best outlined under separate headings.

Inter-Church

Among subjects discussed and schemes assisted were evangelism, the Christian re-construction of Europe, the organisation of 'Home and Family Weeks', difficulties arising over inter-change of pulpits during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the tax on Bibles being imported into Eire, supporting the scheme of the British Council of Churches to assist Austrian Protestants, the relief of refugees following the Hungarian revolution, assisting refugees from the Near East, the plight of Protestants in Colombia, Inter-Church Aid, and refugee relief.

Following the Second World War, 'The Haven', a home for elderly refugees, was established in Dublin. This work, which began when the Rev. David Esler met and welcomed eighteen elderly refugees from Russia, the Baltic States and Hungary, was highly commended by the United Nations' Commissioner whose representative visited the home. This work of mercy, of which the I.C.C. may be justly proud, has now been wound up owing to its necessity coming to an end. Here a special tribute must be paid to Miss Kathleen Huggard for her work with regard to ecumenism in general and more particularly in connection with Christian Aid and 'The Haven'.

Close contact was maintained with the British Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and the Faith and Order Movement. Many of the publications by these bodies were made the subject of special study. Some were welcomed, others were severely criticised. Following meetings of the W.C.C., arrangements were made for conferences to study the reports at 'Irish Amsterdam' (1949) and 'Irish Evanston' (1955). No national conference was held following New Delhi, but a number of local meetings were held, for example, in Dublin and Derry.

The U.C.C.C. was host to the British Council of Churches when it met in Belfast in 1952, and in Dublin in 1961.

An Irish Faith and Order Conference was held in Greystones (1963) in preparation for the first British Faith and Order Conference held in Nottingham in 1964.

A deep interest was taken in youth work through the Youth Committee of the Irish Churches, who organised an International Youth Camp at Shimna House, Newcastle, Co. Down, and through cooperation with the B.C.C. and W.C.C., enabled young people to attend conferences at Vienna, Oslo, Lausanne and Leicester.

Social

The Council also took a deep interest in social welfare. It had a close contact with the Social Responsibility Department of the B.C.C. and the Churches' Industrial Council. It stimulated concern over unemployment, Arnold Marsh's *Full Employment in Ireland* being one of the results. The original committee of the Council in these studies was able to widen the basis of its research through co-operation with Roman Catholics-whose assistance was 'most valuable'. A study was made of Sunday work and trading, and of victimisation within trade unions of members who wished to work. Work in the field of education was always closely linked to that of the corresponding department of the B.C.C., and a thorough study was undertaken of the Northern Ireland Education Bill in 1946-47.

A survey was made of *The Wolfenden Report* (1957). Approaches were made to the Eire Government on the question of women police. Representations were made with regard to the *Ne temere* decree and the Tilson case.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) of the United Nations was welcomed and widely publicised and a statement on Freedom of Speech issued. A memorandum on penal reform in Ireland was submitted to the Eire government, and representations made to the media on programmes and articles on public morals.

Among issues on which action was taken were mental health, the increments to secondary teachers and capitation grants in the Republic, the state of old age pensions, juvenile delinquency, and road safety. For many years the U.C.C.C. had a committee on social responsibility which acted as an advisory body to the Council. This worked in two groups, one for the North, the other for the South, and combining when necessary. Support and encouragement was also given to Voluntary Service Overseas.

In 1965 a Conference of 120 men and women, sponsored by the

Council, met in Belfast to undertake departmental study and consider co-operation in Overseas Missions, Church Extension, Social Service, Education, Youth and Sunday School work, Stewardship, Evangelism and Lay Training, Publications, Women's Organisations, Ministerial Training and Inter-Church Relations.

Since its foundation, the Council has been a meeting-place for the exchange of ideas on social, as well as religious questions, and for planning useful practical works.

Local Councils

The Constitution of the U.C.C.C. stated 'As soon as practicable Local Councils shall be constituted in the principal centres of population'. This was in 1922, yet the Report for 1966 says, 'A ninth local council . . . has sought association with the United Council'-that is, only nine local Councils were affiliated to the U.C.C.C. at the end of forty-four years. While the Council was always prepared to give advice and assistance, because of apathy or a failure to promote interest in ecumenism at the local level, this aspect of inter-Church relations has been largely a failure. The result is that today the work of the Ecumenical Movement in Northern Ireland is, because of misrepresentation and a lack of information and understanding, facing considerable, and often militant, opposition.

CHAPTER 4

The Irish Council of Churches, 1966 - 83

The Report of the U.C.C.C. on the change of title says, 'In November, 1965, the Council resolved to change its title to the Irish Council of Churches, subject to the consent of its constituent bodies in 1966. While realising that this streamlined title does not say everything about the Council that exact and full description and sensitive conservatism would require, we offer the suggested change as earnest of our desire to serve the Churches in Ireland efficiently in such tasks as they will entrust to us for Renewal in the Gospel, for Youth and Ireland and the World'. Consent to changing the name of the Council was duly given.

Much of the work of the I.C.C. is a continuing ministry-interChurch relations, Inter-Church Aid, World Poverty, social responsibility, and so on - which limitation of space makes it impossible even to outline.

Re-organisation

The escalation of the Council's work makes it necessary to refer briefly to the Report of a sub-committee appointed by the I.C.C. in 1970 'to consider its future organisation and work'. On this it was resolved,

- (i) That the constitution of its Executive Committee should be revised so that the member Churches may be involved in it at the highest possible executive level and also that the Committee may be as representative as possible of the laity;
- (ii) That, in view of the programme of work needing its attention in the seventies, the appointment of a full-time executive officer of the Council is desirable;
- (iii) To accept a recommendation to give constructive attention to its relationships with the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland;
- (iv) To express its warm approval of the existence of groups in which Roman Catholics are already co-operating with representatives of the Council's constituent Churches in consultation and action on matters of social concern . . . and its hope that this pattern of relationship may be developed to cover all matters of mutual concern;

(v) To accept a suggestion that a proposal to establish joint working parties on specific problems should be made to the Roman Catholic bishops.

As a result, (1) Joint-working parties with Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church have been formed on a number of social problems, (2) a new Constitution drawn up and approved by the member Churches, and (3) the first full-time Secretary, the Rev. Ralph Baxter, took up the appointment in July 1972.

In 1972-73, in order to create a more widely informed membership in the Churches, the number of members was increased from 45 to 67. Then in 1979, because of (i) the need to involve more members in the ordinary work of the Council, (ii) the developing relation with overseas Churches, especially in Europe and America, (iii) the increasing commitment to the servicing of inter-Church committees and working-parties, and (iv) the increased number of committees set up by the Council, the membership was divided into three Boards - The Inter-Church Board to deal with inter-Church relations in Ireland, local ecumenical activities, evangelism and youth; the Community Affairs Board to deal with political and social concerns, such as, human rights, education, peace work; and the Overseas Board to deal with relations with Councils of Churches outside Ireland, missionary work, Christian Aid, world issues. Each member of the Council was appointed to serve in one of these areas. A document issued by a Board has only the authority of the Board except it has been approved by the Executive Committee or the Council.

Being aware of the gap in communication between the Council and local congregations a major residential Conference of the Churches was held in Dublin in 1971 on the theme 'Forward Together', at which consideration was given to developing patterns for more effective co-operation in the sphere of social responsibility, education, communication and mission at home and overseas. A detailed Report was prepared and copies of this were forwarded for consideration and action to the appropriate departments of the Churches. An occasional news-letter, *Forward Together*, was launched. The needs of Local Councils and Ecumenical Projects for assistance were discussed and an official appointed to give assistance to them.

In 1969-70 the I.C.C. published a series of *Irish Ecumenical Pamphlets* in an effort to break down the communications barrier in ecumenical matters. They attempted to look at various aspects of the ecumenical movement from an Irish point of view, providing valuable information on what is now being done and what might profitably be considered for the future. They also try to clear up common misunderstandings about ecumenism, Christian Unity and Councils of Churches'. A Conference was held at Corrymeela in 1976 to examine three questions: What have

we been able to do? What have we not been able to do? Where do we go from here? In 1977 a group of Protestant/Roman Catholic clergy met at Carshalton, Surrey,

While the number of local Councils, as such, remains small, it would give a completely false picture if one was to limit his account to this. At the same time, it is important not to give a false impression that every activity working for reconciliation in Christ's name had its origin in the I.C.C. though many of those involved are members of the I.C.C. and its Member Churches. There are the regular meetings of the Church Leaders, who launched a courageous Peace Campaign in December, 1974. This with its intensive press and poster advertising, its personal representations to the British Prime Minister, to political parties and its acts of worship was the object of considerable public attention. Editorial reaction to it in both Northern and Southern papers demonstrated that the Churches are still news'. Organisations in which members of the Churches play a leading role include the Churches Central Committee for Community Work, the Irish School of Ecumenics, the Corrymeela Community, Glencree Centre of Reconciliation, Protestant and Catholic Encounter, Glenstal and Greenhills Ecumenical Conferences, All Children Together, Christian Education Movement, and others. Significant as these are, of equal importance is the development of several small local Councils of Churches and similar groupings. Some of these have formal constitutions, others exist on a kind of spontaneous or *ad hoc* basis. Some consist of groups of local clergy, Catholic and Protestant. Others involve lay members as well. All exist for Bible Study, Worship, and to promote understanding and fellowship. A summary of the achievements in this field, entitled *Ecumenism in Ireland*, has been published by Dr. R. D. E. Gallagher and Prof. M. Ledwith.

Inter-Church Centre

In 1977, it was reported that, through the generosity of the German Churches, there was the possibility of new offices being obtained. The result was the opening of the Inter-Church Centre, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast, in November by Dr. Eberhard Spiecker, Evangelical Church of the Rhineland. This gift has provided the I.C.C. with its own headquarters, facilities for its administrative, consultative, and committee work, well equipped offices, and accommodation for a resource-centre.

Co-operation in Outreach

1. Evangelism and World Mission have always been central issues in the work of the I.C.C. and its purpose is to help the Churches to carry out these tasks more effectively. A Working-Party on Evangelism was set up in 1970. Its report raised several points related to the presentation of the Gospel in Irish Society, for example,

- (a) Disdain for restraint and contempt for authority are twin features of Ulster life which we must not dismiss lightly as local symptoms of a universal disease ...
- (b) In some sense the social quagmire and political jungle of the Province are an indictment of the Church, which still retains contact with a large segment of the populace. We have failed to send out into every part of society men and women of committed Christian ideals, who are prepared to demonstrate the relevance of the Gospel to the whole of life ...
- (c) Over and above the words we use, we must mediate to others the presence of the living Christ, so that there may be personal encounter, the rapport between man and God. This is where we must rely upon the Holy Spirit who seems to be the forgotten factor in the current discussions on Christian communication. By offering friendship, by winning confidence, by sharing interests, by genuine caring, we must learn to speak the truth in love.

The relevance to Ireland of the National Initiative in Evangelism of the BCC (1976) was studied and it was concluded 'that such an initiative in Ireland should not take the form of a national co-ordinated campaign, but that it should encourage local efforts to be undertaken in evangelism'. This was duly reported to the Churches for implementation, and a Consultation was held, with an attendance of 41. Again, in 1982, the Churches were approached so that the issue of evangelism could be studied and action taken.

The I.C.C. has always worked closely with Missionary Societies. In 1974, two one-day Conferences were held on World Mission, and addressed by the Rev. Victor Hayward on China. Another Conference was held in Corrymeela in 1976 on the subject 'Together in a Divided World', which was addressed by speakers with missionary experience. Three lines of action were followed up: (a) The study of Mission and the possible setting up of a lectureship on Missiology, (b) Facilitating the process of consultation between all the Missionary bodies and societies based in Ireland, and (c) a Youth Programme for promoting missionary education in schools and colleges. The first of these commenced in 1979/80 with a series of lectures by the Rt. Rev. Donald Kennedy, and facilities were provided by the I.C.C. for the second. Efforts to implement the third have been undertaken, but the only success so far has been in the theological colleges. A special issue of *Forward Together* on the subject of Mission was issued in 1977. In 1978 Mr. R. Whyte, Secretary of the China Study Project, sponsored by the B.C.C. and the Conference of British Missionary Societies, visited Belfast and Dublin.

After consultation with the Youth leaders of the Churches, efforts have been made to interest youth in mission, the most notable achievement being the raising of almost £75,000 in 1980-81 by the Sunday

Schools and Youth Organisations for the Ludhiana Hospital. In 1980, a group of young people went on a four-week visit to India.

In addition, the I.C.C. arranged for representatives of the Churches to attend international conferences on Mission, including that at Melbourne in 1980.

II. Christian Aid is a Division of the B.C.C. It is the largest Church-related overseas agency in Britain. It was born in the closing years of World War II, when there were millions of refugees and displaced persons throughout Europe. The Christian Churches saw the necessity to become involved in the work of re-construction. In 1964 the original name of the charity was changed to Christian Aid. While it has been described as 'the official collecting agent for Church donations for all refugee, relief, and development purposes', Christian Aid is in essence very much more. It is an agent to enable the Churches to exercise their caring role. Originally its involvement was almost entirely limited to refugee resettlement in war-wrecked Europe, but its relief activities soon spread to the Middle East, the Far East, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Later developments led to operation in the field of development and nation-building. The story has been told excellently by Janet Lacey in her history of 'Christian Aid', and so need not be repeated here. Christian Aid has no projects of its own. Its role is to co-ordinate requests from local Churches, which have been endorsed by the National Christian Councils in the countries concerned and screened by experts. It, also, takes action in emergencies, such as in Uganda, Vietnam, Kampuchea, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and elsewhere. A Report is presented annually to the I.C.C. and B.C.C. It makes available to congregations literature, film-strips, and films, including *To Serve the Present Age*, the story of Christian Aid.

Its Report in 1977 challenged the Irish Churches as follows: 1. It asks 'What is our commitment to the poor of the world?'. 2. It asks us to consider our own lifestyle. 3. It asks us to become partners of the poor. 4. It asks us what are the political implications of poverty? 5. It asks us to consider what development is.

In 1981, the I.C.C. urged the Government to take seriously the implications of the *Brandt Report* 'and to seek to implement them as soon as possible' and called 'for the restoration of the Development Education Budget and for an increase of official aid to 0.7% of Gross National Product by 1985'. In 1982, it congratulated the Government of the Republic 'on committing itself to reaching the UN target' and made a further approach to the British Government to take a similar decision.

In conclusion, perhaps a word of thanks may be offered on behalf of the I.C.C., not only to those who have acted as Organising Secretary

over the years, but also to the large number of volunteers who play such an important role during Christian Aid Week.

III. The Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace have evolved a Development Education Programme with funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs in the Republic. Mrs. Grainne O'Flynn was employed at the beginning of 1980 and considerable achievement made in the incorporation of development education into the secondary school syllabus in the Republic of Ireland.

IV. Youth work is vital for the future of the Churches, and each year the I.C.C. Youth Committee presents a report on its activities. From the ecumenical viewpoint stress is placed upon the need 'for young people to meet and establish relationships'. Joint youth-camps were held in 1970 and 1971 for boys from 'ghetto' areas on both sides of the Peace Line in Belfast. In 1971, an ecumenical all-night vigil was held in Stranmillis College, Belfast, under the leadership of Michel Quoist, and vigils and conferences were a feature of the years 1971-73. These years are important for the growth of mutual trust and respect which developed between Protestant and Roman Catholic youth leaders, for the beginning of joint-training of youth workers, and the publication of a joint Church youth-leaders' manual, *Together with Youth*. The importance of this may be seen in the fact that at the Youth Festival in the King's Hall, Belfast, in 1983, the Youth Departments of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches serviced a joint-stand.

In 1974, a joint youth-workers consultation was held at Ennis, Co. Clare, and a weekend Conference was held at Corrymeela, with 100 present, conducted by Brother Anthony of the Taize Community of the Reformed Church in France. Forty others attended a B.C.C. Conference in Liverpool. The following year the I.C.C.'s Organising Secretary, Peter Moss, was elected European Chairman, and three Ecumenical Youth Camps were held in Ireland, at Castledawson, Manorhamilton and Banbridge. In 1976, there were three more such camps, four young people attended an Ecumenical Youth Conference of Europe in Holland on 'Faith Today', and the following year a Conference was held in Castlewellan on 'Confessing Christ Today'. In 1978, about ninety young people from Ireland attended 'Dayspring' of the B.C.C., with a follow-up in November, and work-camps were held at Tallaght and Benburb. In 1979, an Irish Festival of Christian Youth was held at Downpatrick, when 150 young people, including one-third Roman Catholics, participated. Camps were visited at Berchem, Kivisaari, Beirut, Vergeletto, Ebeltoft, and Dusseldorf, and work-camps arranged in Gardiner Street, Dublin, and Glencairn, Belfast.

A Youth Projects Officer was appointed in 1978 but when his term of

office ended in 1980, it was found impossible for financial reasons to make another appointment. As a result, discussions have taken place with Church Youth Departments about the re-organisation of I.C.C. Youth Work, and a Consultation held with the Member Churches in 1980. During the year 35 young people attended the British Isles Youth Festival, 'Mannafest', at Lincoln, organised by the B.C.C.

V. In recent years the B.C.C. has published two important documents, *The Child in the Church* and its sequel *Understanding Christian Nurture*. Over the past two years three conferences to study them have been organised by the I.C.C. Child in the Church Group. It is worth noting that the attendance has, on two occasions, been over sixty, and that all the Member Churches have at some time been represented. Further, out of this an In-service Training Conference was held in Antrim on 'Family Worship'.

VI. The Committee on Women's Church Organisations meets and maintains contacts between the women of the Member Churches. They held two rallies in 1978, one in Dublin and the other in Belfast, and in both 1979 and 1980 'A Day of Christian Fellowship and Prayer' was held in Dundalk. Throughout the Member Churches the Woman's World Day of Prayer is widely observed.

Ireland

The promulgation of the 'Decree on Ecumenism', (*Unitatis redintegratio*) by Vatican II in 1964, and the outbreak of terrorism, 1969-70, have had a marked effect on the work of the I.C.C. Social and political issues, joint-working with the Roman Catholic Church, and relations with Churches overseas have received a new prominence.

The Council has been heavily involved in seeking to improve community relations and maintain the principles of social justice in the name of Jesus Christ. On the occasion of the cancellation of the visit of the Bishop of Ripon to Belfast in 1967, because of denial of freedom of speech by Paisleyites, its Executive Committee declared

That civil and religious liberty can never be equated with blatant attempts to suppress free speech and the search for information ... Its conviction that a continuation of these agitations, demonstrations and pressures to which Belfast is being increasingly subjected in the name of religion can only drive increasing numbers into cynicism and open hostility to organised Christianity

That Christian charity calls upon all, irrespective of denomination, to a continuing study of the teaching of Holy Scripture and a new submission to our Lord Jesus Christ, and all that is implied in his commandment that we should love one another, our neighbours and our enemies.

In the present Irish crisis, the Council has been greatly concerned to speak and act constructively as tensions and violence have increased. Frequently it has called for wrongs to be righted and for more progressive policies to be followed. It has taken initiatives often of a confidential nature in the hope that significant action would result. Such activity, though remaining unpublicised because of its confidential nature, has not gone unnoticed. Initiatives have been taken to establish direct personal contacts with civil, political and religious leaders of widely differing viewpoints. Contacts have been made with Ministers of State and government officials. This aspect of the work of the Council must continue so long as it is a useful exercise in understanding and in the promotion of Christian standards in society.

Perhaps for the sake of clarity a brief summary of decisions of the I.C.C. may be given. Following the riots arising after the Civil Rights March in 1968, the Executive Committee of the I.C.C. called for 'consultation with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church with a view to discovering how the Churches together can make an effective contribution towards improving community relations in Ireland'. When the full Council met on 7th November this was modified to 'consult with responsible leaders on what practical steps might now be taken to advance the work of reconciliation'.

After the encounter at Burntollet in 1969, the I.C.C. Executive invited the Primate, Moderator and President to attend its meeting, and they wrote (i) to the Prime Minister asking for a judicial enquiry into the causes of unrest and their solution, (ii) to the Press expressing their condemnation of the events at Burntollet, and (iii) to Cardinal Conway suggesting 'the time had come for some form of joint-consultation'. The first helped to ensure the setting up of the Cameron Commission. In answer to the third, the Cardinal praised the courageous stand of the I.C.C. and welcomed the possibility of joint-consultation.

Captain Terence O'Neill, who had introduced a policy of reform, was overthrown as Prime Minister by his supposed 'friends', and on 1 May, 1969, the I.C.C. welcomed the fact that his successor, Major James Chichester-Clark, had committed himself to pursue this policy of reform, and called upon the Churches to consider ways of contributing to the cause of social reconciliation.

In 1970, the governing bodies of the Churches approved the setting up of the Joint Group on Social Problems, duly appointed by the Churches of the I.C.C. on the one hand and the Roman Catholic Hierarchy on the other. This will be discussed more fully in the section on Relations with the Roman Catholic Church.

When the Westminster Parliament suspended the Stormont

Parliament in the first place for one year, there was a tremendous increase in tension, suspicion, and fear, and the I.C.C. appealed to all the political parties to co-operate and 'use the next twelve months as an opportunity to act constructively'. As may be seen by looking at the scene in 1983, there is still a great need for constructive political action.

In 1972, the Westminster Government produced a discussion paper setting out alternative possibilities so far as the majority/minority relationship in Northern Ireland is concerned, if local autonomy were restored. The I.C.C. commended this to the Churches, political parties, and people urging all to act responsibly.

Although a large section of public opinion had not been represented at Sunningdale (through their own choice), the I.C.C. welcomed 'the principle of power-sharing as offering an opportunity for all sections of the community in Northern Ireland to make a positive contribution to the public good'.

In 1976, the Joint Group produced a report *Violence in Ireland*. While approved and received by the Churches and others little effort has been made to implement its recommendations. That there has been a renewal of interest in the Report in recent times is most welcome.

In response to allegations of ill-treatment of suspects while in custody, both in the North of Ireland and the Republic, Commissions of Enquiry were set up in both jurisdictions and at its meeting in 1979, the I.C.C. called on both governments to implement in full the recommendations of these Commissions.

In 1980, the I.C.C. through its Advisory Forum on Human Rights issued an interim report on prison conditions in the Maze. The Forum then took up 'Prisoners Rights and Conditions in the Republic of Ireland'. Other studies published by the Forum include *A Right to Work?* published in 1981, and *The Churches' Rights in Education in Ireland* in 1983.

This brief outline can in no way set out the stress and strain involved by both Protestants and Roman Catholics, or on the I.C.C. as it sought to deal with a serious and dangerous situation. The I.C.C. appointed a Standing Deputation to political leaders in 1972. They have met leaders and representatives of all parties concerning internment, civil disobedience, reform, security, threat of a Protestant backlash, non-cooperation, etc. Much of this had to be confidential and cannot be enlarged upon.

An Information Seminar for foreign journalists and representatives of European and other Churches was organised by the I.C.C. and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in 1976. In 1982 a joint Conference of the B.C.C./I.C.C. Committee and the Commissions for

Justice and Peace of Ireland, Scotland, and England, was held in Liverpool to discuss the situation in Ireland.

The Spring Meeting of the Council in 1978 was addressed by Professor N. J. Gibson on the subject 'Pluralism in Ireland', and a sub-committee was set up to consider '(i) the aim the I.C.C. should have in view if further consideration is to be given to the subject and also the method to be adopted in attaining that aim; (ii) the report on "Pluralism" published by the Presbyterian Church, and to suggest ways in which the Member Churches might implement its recommendations'.

The Joint Group's Report on *Violence in Ireland* called for a 'sustained and far-reaching programme of education within the Churches by which their members may be made more aware of the political and social implications for Irish Society'. This has resulted in the I.C.C. appointing the Rev. John Knox for a four-year Peace Project, in which he collaborated closely with the Irish Roman Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. A study-guide *What the Bible says about Peace* was published in 1979, and another *What the Bible says about Violence* in 1980. Materials for a Primary Schools Programme have been prepared, and government approval and financial assistance obtained for its use in schools.

The issue of unemployment figures prominently in the Council's thinking in recent years owing to the economic depression, resulting in one worker in four now being jobless. The Council submitted its views on the Government of the Republic's green paper, 'Development for full Employment' in 1979. A complete issue of *Forward Together* was given to this subject in 1980. In co-operation with the Churches' Central Committee for Community Work a leaflet entitled *The Time for Action is Now* was published in 1982. It sets out in practical terms what the Churches can do.

Other studies have been published on a variety of current problems, and a number of these are listed in the section on Relations with the Roman Catholic Church.

Co-operation with other Councils

I. The British Council of Churches was founded in 1942, since when the U.C.C.C. and the I.C.C. have maintained a close relationship with it, not only by sending representatives to its meetings, but through visits to the Council of B.C.C. officials and by periodic meetings of some of its

Departments in Ireland. In January 1968, the Social Responsibility Department met in Belfast, when a public meeting in Queen's University was addressed by Fr. E. Casey (now Bishop of Galway) and the Rev. E. Rogers on 'The People and their Homes'; the following September its Education Department met in Dublin. In 1969, its Youth Department

met in Belfast. In April 1979 the I.C.C. hosted the Spring Assembly of the B.C.C. in Belfast. Its agenda included an 'Encounter with Irish Life'.

The fact that the main Protestant Churches are members of the B.C.C. means that they have received not only understanding and help from the B.C.C., but also that they and the I.C.C. have been faced 'with the challenge of independent judgement on their policies and achievements'. This has been most valuable in enabling a balanced outlook to be taken.

In 1971, a panel of Church leaders was given an opportunity at the B.C.C.'s autumn meeting to discuss the crisis. The B.C.C.'s Executive Committee issued a statement, saying 'The Executive believes that the Christian faith requires of its disciples a loyalty wide and deep enough to transcend the traditional political divisions between Catholics and Protestants who are each the followers of the same Lord. It pays tribute to the leaders of the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Northern Ireland for their contribution to securing restraint in a time of extreme provocation. It urges the leaders and members of the Churches to make still greater efforts to contain passions and to take fresh courageous initiatives to establish effective co-operative ventures in which Catholics and Protestants can share together in the service of all the peoples of Northern Ireland. It is aware that such initiatives may have divisive effects within the Churches but it believes that Christian duty requires that new efforts be made to re-establish and deepen that fellowship across the denominational divisions which has been so gravely injured in the past two years'. A further specific discussion on Ireland was held in the B.C.C. Assembly in 1980.

The B.C.C. Executive also set up an Irish Advisory Group with the task of 'maintaining liaison with the I.C.C. and of guiding the B.C.C. in all matters connected with the Northern Ireland situation, including the serious issues raised by the economic situation, escalating violence, internment and the Compton Report'. As well as the Advisory Group a special Irish Fund was set up. In the first year £10,000 was given to 'a variety of projects', and within four years almost £29,500. Then the Fund was wound up, and a new one opened from which grants amounting to over £40,000 have been given.

A Consultation was held in 1976 consisting of B.C.C./I.C.C. Church leaders. Since then it has met twice yearly. A Consultation on children's holiday schemes was organised. In 1978 it prepared a leaflet *Praying for Ireland* which has a circulation each year of from 70,000-90,000. Such prayer-support has been a great assurance to the I.C.C., all the Irish Churches, and others who are working for reconciliation.

In 1979 the I.C.C. studied the Report *Britain, Today and Tomorrow*, was enabled to participate in a conference on its contents, and examined

the *Child in the Church* publication, to which reference has been made above.

Through the B.C.C., the I.C.C. received visits during the present year from the China Christian Council and the Churches in the USSR, and so enabled contacts to be renewed with fellow-Christians from whom we had been separated for years as the result of political events and war.

II. The World Council of Churches was founded in 1948, since when the I.C.C., while not an Associate Council, has had friendly contacts. The Rev. N. W. Taggart attended a world consultation on the theme, 'Re-thinking the Role of Christian Councils Today' in 1971. Dr. Philip Potter, General Secretary of the W.C.C., visited the I.C.C. in 1974. Members attended the W.C.C. Assembly at Nairobi in 1975 on the subject 'Jesus Christ Free and Unites'. Mr. Pieter Bouman, Europe Secretary of the W.C.C., visited Belfast and Dublin the following year. A consultation was held by the W.C.C. Sub-Unit on 'Renewal and Congregational Life' in Rostrevor to explore the relationship which existed or should be developed between the W.C.C. and the Charismatic Movement.

Following the grant by the W.C.C. from the Special Fund to the Patriotic Front, at the Autumn Meeting of the Council in 1978 the following resolution was passed: 'That the Irish Council of Churches, having considered the grant from the Special Fund of the Programme to Combat Racism to the Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe, and being convinced that this grant raises the question of the role of the Churches in a conflict situation, feels that the Member Churches of the Council have a duty to speak to the World Council of Churches out of experience gained in a ten-year conflict, on the vocation of the Churches in such a situation, and although it is not an Associate Council of the World Council of Churches, resolves that it:

- (i) shares the concern expressed in the Member Churches and throughout this country that the World Council of Churches has identified itself with and supported a group committed to violent resolution of the conflict in Rhodesia;
- (ii) believes that in a situation where anti-racists are on both sides, the World Council of Churches in its administration of the Programme to Combat Racism ought to manifest its solidarity with all who are seeking a settlement through the process of negotiation;
- (iii) urges the World Council of Churches to undertake a review of the status, structure and policies of the Programme to Combat Racism, especially as these affect other aspects of the Council's work and, in particular, the pressing need for it to exercise a positive ministry of reconciliation through local churches involved in conflict situations;

- (iv) strongly supports the call for re-appraisal of the administration and criteria of the Special Fund;
- (v) urges that the Special Fund money be channelled through Church bodies in the recipient country or with the approval of these Churches through international agencies or representative local committees which could be responsible for screening applications, decisions on grant-aid and follow-up procedure;
- (vi) encourages its Member Churches and Secretariat to share with the World Council of Churches some of the lessons and insights learned through involvement in the work of reconciliation and the administration of grant-aid in this island;
- (vii) instructs the Executive Committee to consult with the Member Churches so that practical steps may be taken as a matter of urgency to intensify opposition to racism.'

A copy of this Resolution was sent to all the Member Churches of the W.C.C. and to the W.C.C. Headquarters.

The Council facilitated a meeting between Dr. Philip Potter, General Secretary of the W.C.C., and the Irish Member Churches of the W.C.C. The meeting was held in Dublin in December and the Programme to Combat Racism and the grant to the Patriotic Front were discussed.

A delegation from the W.C.C. visited Ireland to meet with representatives of the Irish Member Churches of the W.C.C. and the I.C.C. to share the W.C.C.'s concern for the life and work of the Churches ministering in a conflict situation and to learn about the situation.

Dr. Gyula Svehla of the Presbyterian Church represented the three Irish Member Churches of the W.C.C. at a Conference on Science/Technology/Religion in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, in 1979. The I.C.C. was represented at the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, Melbourne, 1980. The maintenance of Christian fellowship through the W.C.C. has ensured an ecumenical rather than a national or provincial approach to the work of Christ's Church in facing Ireland's problems.

III. The National Council of Churches of Christ, USA, had an Irish Desk from 1975-1979 with the Rev. David Bowman, SJ in charge. During the years since 1974, gifts of over \$140,000 have been received. An Information Seminar was held in Belfast for thirty-four American Churchmen, and Consultations in New York and Belfast. In 1981, the General Secretary of the I.C.C. represented the I.C.C. and B.C.C. at the N.C.C.C.'s special 30th Anniversary Ecumenical Event held in Cleveland, Ohio.

IV. In 1976 a Brethren Volunteer Service Ireland Committee was formed to support volunteers sent by the Church of the Brethren, USA,

to Ireland. This voluntary help and payment of salaries has been of great assistance to those working for reconciliation in Ireland and is greatly appreciated by the I.C.C.

V. The Conference of European Churches in December, 1972, set up an Emergency Fund for Ireland. In consultation with the I.C.C. and the late Cardinal Conway, terms of reference for projects were drawn up in 1973, and a Committee, representing both the I.C.C. and the Roman Catholic Church, was appointed, called the Inter-Church Emergency Fund for Ireland. So great was the generosity of the European Churches that Dr. David Stevens was appointed Projects Officer in 1975. In addition to financial help, C.E.C. established a contact service, and conference facilities were offered in Holland. At a later date a Roman Catholic Fund was set up alongside the C.E.C. Fund. To date, the committee has allocated over £72,000 to over 200 projects.

VI. The Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF) is an international Charitable Foundation incorporated in 1946 under Swiss law in Geneva. Its object is to make loans available, through National Committees, for Church and Church-related projects. Its capital is derived from gifts, and since it does not have to service this capital, the loans can be made available on a low rate of interest. The I.C.C. set up in 1977 an Irish National Committee of ECLOF. Mr. A. J. Turnbull, Director of ECLOF, visited Ireland in 1978, during which low-interest loans to a value of £20,000 were made. The capital of the Fund is now in the region of £130,000.

VII. The I.C.C. is a member of the Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society in the European Community.

Relations with the Roman Catholic Church

I. The setting up of the Joint Group on Social Problems on the initiative of the I.C.C. in 1970, consisting of officially appointed representatives of the Member Churches of the I.C.C. and the Roman Catholic Hierarchy, was a most significant step in Irish inter-Church relations. In 1971, having already met six times, it presented its first Report, entitled 'The Welfare of the People' to the I.C.C. in 1971. It had arranged for five working parties on a variety of problems. This work has continued over the years and the following Reports have been published: *Drug Abuse* (1972), *Housing in Northern Ireland* (1973), *Use of Alcohol among Young People* (1974), *The Churches' Response to Under development in Rural Ireland* (1976), *Violence in Ireland* (1976), *Environmental Problems in Ireland* (1980), and *Leisure in Ireland* (1982).

II. On 17th July, 1972, the Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church responded to an overture from the I.C.C. and issued an

invitation to the Member Churches to attend a joint meeting at which the whole field of ecumenism in Ireland might be surveyed'. What was envisaged was 'a general review of relations between the Christian Churches in Ireland and the possibilities of further dialogue on both practical and doctrinal issues'. The I.C.C. reported to the Churches, and with some qualifications the invitation was accepted. So, on 26th September, 1973, about ninety representatives of the Churches in Ireland met in Ballymascanlon Hotel, Dundalk, for what was officially referred to as an Inter-Church Meeting. The I.C.C. Report, 1974, says 'There can be no doubt that it was an important event ..., an enormous step forward in inter-Church relations in our country for which we would hardly have dared to hope over a decade ago'. As details of the discussions and work of Ballymascanlon have been edited and published by Bishop Cahal Daly and Dr. Stanley Worrall in *Ballymascanlon, An Irish Venture in InterChurch Dialogue in 1978*, only a brief summary is necessary here.

The first meeting was presided over by Cardinal W. Conway and Archbishop G.O. Simms. Papers with prepared comments from 'the other side' were read, covering four areas -

Scripture/Authority/Church. Social
and Community Problems.

Baptism/Eucharist/Marriage.

Christianity and Secularism.

Working parties were set up to carry forward study under these headings. By the Spring of 1975, when the Conference met for the third time, interim reports were presented by the first three and a final Report by the fourth.

The fourth Ballymascanlon met in May, 1977, when, the papers having been circulated beforehand, discussion took place on - The Church in the Gospels and St. Paul. Historical Breaches in Christendom. The Theology of Christian Unity. Principles and Practice.

The fifth Conference was held in March 1980, when two 'Survey Papers on Inter-Church Activities' were read by Dr. R. D. E. Gallagher and Professor Michel Ledwith. These have since been published under the title, *Ecumenism in Ireland*. Working parties and study groups were set up on the Eucharist and the Implications for Unity, Marian Devotion, and St. John's Gospel and the Psalms. A sixth Conference has been arranged for March, 1983.

Some people complain because greater progress has not been made, others feel frustrated because some issues, for example, mixed marriages or education, have not appeared on the agenda. So let the writer, as a

member of the Steering Committee, say that the polemics and divisions and suspicions of almost five centuries cannot be overcome overnight. While it is his opinion that 'in the ecumenical movement the one essential thing is that every question is open for discussion and no Church or Council of Churches has the right to veto a topic or a problem', nevertheless 'Festina lente' (hasten slowly) may not be an altogether inadvisable motto in a quagmire of suspicion, hatred, and polemics. No matter how slow the progress is, if the people of Ireland are to be saved from self-destruction, the talks must not break down. The words of Gallagher and Worrall concerning the first meeting are worth remembering, 'The press tended to regard it as a "peace conference", and expressed impatience when proposals for the solution of the political problem did not emerge. It became necessary to emphasize that this was a dialogue about the standing issues that divided the Churches, and that any political outcome would be the indirect result of improved relationships and the removal of misunderstandings'.

Since 1978, Roman Catholic Observers have attended Council meetings of the I.C.C.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Under the Chairmanship of the Rev. F. N. Warren, a member of the B.C.C.'s Committee for Unity in Prayer, a working party was appointed to enquire into the observance in Ireland of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It is now widely, though not universally, observed, and in addition to the B.C.C. material, an Irish Leaflet is provided by a Joint I.C.C./Roman Catholic Committee.

Finance

One could truthfully say that lack of financial support was one of the principal hindrances to development in the early days of the I.C.C. From 1923 to 1966, the days of the U.C.C.C., the grants from the Churches only once exceeded £250, when it was but £10 more. However, from what has been said above it should be evident that the I.C.C. could not have carried out its work over the years without the financial assistance it received from America, Canada, Germany, Holland, and elsewhere. It is vital that the Member Churches face up to the issue of making the I.C.C. self-supporting in its routine costs from Irish sources.

Anniversaries

The Golden Jubilee of the Council was marked by a Service of Thanksgiving in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, at which the preacher was the Rev. Kenneth Slack, formerly General Secretary of the B.C.C. There was also a lecture on 'Ecumenism and the Reformation' given by Professor Gordon Rupp in Queen's University, Belfast.

It has been arranged to hold a Service of Thanksgiving to mark the Council's Diamond Jubilee in The Abbey, Bangor, on 18th March, 1983.

The Council and the Churches

The I.C.C. is a Council of Churches. It is not a Church. Its function is to assist and help the Churches to witness in the name of Christ. It is the servant of Christ and of the Member Churches for the glory of God and the welfare of Ireland and of mankind. It reports to the Member Churches annually, and its decisions and activities are submitted to the General Synod, the General Assembly, Conference, and the other governing bodies. The Council is a non-legislative body which provides a forum for discussion, co-operation, and joint action by the Churches.

What the future holds for Ireland one cannot tell, so no 'blue-print' can be drawn up. Ireland may be a democracy in which the Churches give Christian leadership or become a totalitarian tyranny. It is the task of the I.C.C. and the Churches to see the latter does not become a reality, but rather that future generations may inherit from us a set of standards, moral and spiritual, in harmony with the mind of Christ, the sole king and Head of the Church.
Laus Deo.

The story of the Irish Council of Churches is told by a distinguished historian who has taken an active part in its development. In a tumultuous period in Irish history, the origin of inter-Church co-operation and the reactions to the many changes in the social and religious scene are summed up in a clear and concise way. Many people will be surprised that the Irish Council of Churches pre-dates the British Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. The writer has also taken the opportunity to underline the special contributions to partnership in mission which have been pioneered by the Council and which are reflected in its current programmes.

Dr. John Barkley was Professor of Church History at the Presbyterian College, Belfast (now Union Theological College) from 1954 until his retirement in 1981 and Principal from 1976 to 1981. He is at present Chairman of the Irish Council of Churches.