

THE IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING

BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

Introduction	1
Notes about the authors	2
The Preparatory Years - Rev Michael Hurley SJ	3
The period since 1973 - Rev Dr Ian Ellis	40

The first Inter-Church Meeting was held at the Ballymascanlon Hotel, Dundalk, on September 26, 1973 (this is why the series of meetings became commonly known as the Ballymascanlon Talks). It was the first official meeting between the Member Churches of the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Episcopal Conference and is thus an historic event.

This first Meeting led to a process of ecumenical encounters and co-operation which has grown in intensity over the twenty-five years. Proposals are currently before the Churches which could lead to a further stage of development in interchurch relations.

To commemorate the 25th Anniversary the Irish Inter-Church Committee commissioned two reflective essays. The first is by the Rev Michael Hurley SJ and it seeks to place the first Irish Inter-Church Meeting in the context of broader ecumenical developments of that time. The second is by the Rev Dr Ian Ellis who seeks to bring the story up to the present.

We thank them for what they have done and hope that their work will be of interest to all those who are interested in the development of Irish ecumenism.

The story of ecumenism in Ireland has been intertwined with that of 'The Troubles' over the last twenty-five years, particularly in Northern Ireland. As, hopefully, we move into a less troubled era we can envisage energy for ecumenical encounter and common action being released. The first twenty-five years are only just a start.

We are about to enter a new millennium - one in which we hope that relationships between the Christian Churches will be profoundly different to those in this. Let it be Lord.

The Most Rev Dr Sean Brady
The Rev Edmund Mawhinney
Co-Chairmen.

June 1998

NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHORS.

REV DR IAN ELLIS

The Rev Dr Ian Ellis is Rector of St. John's Church of Ireland Parish, Newcastle, Co. Down. He is currently Vice-President of the Irish Council of Churches and a member of the Irish Inter-Church Committee. He was Honorary Secretary of the Committee for Christian Unity of the Church of Ireland 1980-1998. He is author of *Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations*.

REV MICHAEL HURLEY SJ

The Rev Michael Hurley is a Jesuit Priest. He was appointed to teach theology at the Jesuit Theological College, Milltown Park, Dublin in 1958. During the 1960s he developed a serious interest in ecumenism which led him to found the Irish School of Ecumenics in 1970. After retiring as Director of the School Father Hurley founded the Columbanus Community of Reconciliation - an interchurch residential community in Belfast - in 1983. He retired from the Columbanus Community in 1993. Father Hurley is the author of many articles and books, the most recent being a collection of essays entitled *The New Millennium and the Unity of Christians: An Ecumenical Second Spring?*

THE PREPARATORY YEARS

Rev Michael Hurley SJ

DEDICATION

This essay is dedicated with affection to the memory of the Rev Professor John M Barkley, Presbyterian historian and ecumenist, who died shortly before Christmas 1997.

John Barkley, who was born in the same year as the ecumenical movement itself (1910), was a member of the General Assembly's Inter-Church Relations Committee/Board (1948-1980), Presbyterian Patron of the Irish School of Ecumenics (1970-1988), Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Union Theological College, Belfast (1954/1981), College Principal (1976-1981) and Chairman of the Irish Council of Churches (1983-1985). He was a Presbyterian so devoted to the cause of promoting Christian Unity, in particular between Roman Catholics and Protestants, that in 1977 he declined the office and honour of Moderator of General Assembly because, among other reasons, it would inhibit his religious freedom as an ecumenist.²

I. EPOCH-MAKING?

'The year 1973 was epoch making': so, with reference precisely to the Ballymascanlon Conference which marked the beginning of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, wrote John Barkley.³ The first part of this chapter attempts to explain why Ballymascanlon is seen as 'historic', as 'epoch-making'. The second describes some of the unofficial moves which seem to have prepared the way for Ballymascanlon. The third part recalls some of the official moves which preceded it. The fourth offers some reflections by way of conclusion. There is general agreement that 1973 was 'epoch-making' in the history of Irish interchurch relations. The compiler of 'Some Notable Events in the Catholic Life of Ireland in 1973' wrote that 'a whole new era in Catholic-Protestant relations in Ireland has opened'.⁴ The Irish Council of Churches wrote of 'an enormous step forward in interchurch relations in our country for which we would hardly have dared to hope over a decade ago'.⁵ Cardinal Conway, Archbishop of Armagh, spoke more modestly: he referred to the event as 'very significant... an important advance'.⁶ Bishop Cahal, now Cardinal, Daly and Mr Stanley Worrall in their 1978 digest of the proceedings

remind us that 'the first meeting in 1973 was widely hailed as an historic moment in the history of the Christian Churches in Ireland'⁷. And writing in 1995 Dr Dermot Keogh, Professor of History at University College, Cork, in a study commissioned by the Dublin Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, acknowledged that the Ballymascanlon meetings 'proved to be of historical importance'⁸.

OFFICIAL PARTICIPATION BY CATHOLICS

26 September 1973 is an historic date and Ballymascanlon is an historic place because then and there for the very first time the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland participated officially in the ecumenical movement. That movement firmly believed, in the remarkable, moving but seldom quoted words of the Lambeth Conference of 1908, that

there can be no fulfilment of the Divine purpose in any scheme of reunion which does not ultimately include the great Latin Church of the West, with whom our history has been so closely associated in the past, and to which we are still bound by very many ties of common faith and tradition.⁹

The two international, inter-denominational movements - 'Life and Work' (emphasizing the more practical aspects of Christianity) and 'Faith and Order' (emphasizing the more doctrinal aspects) - which in 1948 coalesced to form the World Council of Churches had made every effort to win the support of the Vatican but failed.¹⁰ From the very beginning the official Roman Catholic attitude to ecumenism was negative. It found expression in the uncompromising words of the 1928 Encyclical letter of Pius XI *Mortalium Animos*:

There is but one way in which the unity of Christians may be fostered, and that is by furthering the return to the one true Church of Christ of those who are separated from it; for from that one true Church they have in the past fallen away.¹¹

Evidence of some softening of this negative stance can be found in a 1949 Vatican document *Ecclesia Catholica*. But not until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) did the Roman Catholic Church become positive in its attitude to ecumenism. And not until 1973 did the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference as such become involved in interchurch, ecumenical dialogue.

Before 1973, as we shall see, individual Roman Catholic bishops had given their blessing, approval, sanction, to various interchurch

ventures taking place in their dioceses and so made them 'official' in a real sense, at least for the Roman Catholic participants. The Glenstal and Greenhills Conferences are examples. Ballymascanlon was 'official' from a Roman Catholic point of view not only because the event had episcopal approval, indeed the approval of the Episcopal Conference itself, but also because, as Cardinal Daly expressed it to me in conversation,¹² the delegates were 'mandated' by the Hierarchy. And presumably for the added reason that their partners were similarly mandated as they never were at Glenstal or Greenhills.

OFFICIAL PARTICIPATION BY PROTESTANTS

Ballymascanlon 1973 is also 'historic' and 'epoch-making' because it was the first time that the non-Roman Catholic Churches in Ireland (the Irish Protestant Churches if, for convenience sake, I may so describe them) engaged officially with the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. The Irish Protestant Churches participated officially in both 'Life and Work' and 'Faith and Order' and became members of the World Council of Churches and so remain, apart from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland which withdrew in 1980. But what evidence is there that the Irish Protestant Churches and their United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communion in Ireland (UCCCR) and its successor body, the Irish Council of Churches (ICC),¹³ would have said 'amen' to the Lambeth statement quoted above? What evidence is there that their official ecumenism was anything more than 'Pan-Protestantism' (a closer fellowship of all the Protestant Churches)? The anti-Romanism which is, understandably, an endemic feature of all forms of Protestantism is a particularly strong and entrenched feature of Irish Protestantism, as anti-Protestantism is a marked feature of Irish Catholicism.

There is happily a considerable body of evidence to show that at the unofficial level both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches in Ireland, or at least many of their members, saw a closer relationship with each other, Christian unity if not union, as desirable, indeed as a divine imperative; and one aim of this essay is to adduce some of it. The evidence at official level is much less abundant; it does exist but it is scant. As we have seen, John Barkley considered that the year 1973 was 'epoch making'. Interestingly however his reason was not the publication that very year of the report of the Tripartite Consultation of the Church of Ireland, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches entitled *Towards a United Church*.¹⁴ His reason rather was the fact

that an official Catholic-Protestant Conference was held for the first time. For John Barkley at least 'Pan-Protestantism' was not an adequate answer to the scandal of Christian disunity. But was John Barkley perhaps more the exception than the rule?

As remembered and described by Rev Dr R D Eric Gallagher,¹⁵ the UCCC in the late 40s was a tired, rather moribund body. It did in 1949 after the First Assembly of the WCC hold an 'Irish Amsterdam' and in 1956 after the Second Assembly an 'Irish Evanston'. The booklet published after the 'Irish Amsterdam' meeting states that 'owing to the policy of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, effective cooperation with that body is practically impossible in any department of Church work. The rigid attitude of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to mixed marriages makes social intercourse dangerous.'¹⁶ *Irish Evanston* is more positive:

Desiring to share all the riches of Christ given to our fellow-Christians, we regret that the Roman Catholic Church isolates herself from the rest of the Christian Church in our common attempt to understand the Word of the Living God to this day and generation.¹⁷

There is however little if any evidence that co-operation with the Roman Catholic Church was considered really desirable by the Protestant Churches at this stage. Isolationism was mutually acceptable.

It is however worthy of note that, although it was agreed that 'there is a great need for aggressive evangelism'¹⁸, nowhere is it stated or suggested that the making of converts from the Church of Rome was a priority or an important task for Irish Protestantism. At that time the work of individual conversions from other Churches was accepted as normal ministry by both Irish Catholics and Protestants. One Irish Protestant reflecting on a visit to Kerry in the late 50s could write: 'the thing that saddened me most was the absence of Protestantism and the blight of Romanism over all'.¹⁹ The writer was none other than a Methodist minister who felt able to play chess in his Portadown manse with a Catholic publican²⁰ and who was the father of Eric Gallagher. Pre-Vatican II Roman Catholics, travelling in other counties of Ireland and in other countries of the world would of course also have felt saddened by the absence of Catholicism and 'the blight' of Protestantism over all.

On the other hand these Reports provide no evidence that 'Pan-Protestantism' was accepted as anything more than a practical aim and

objective. *Irish Amsterdam* does describe UCCC as 'striving to move the Protestant Churches to common work for the common Lord'²¹. The main problem however was not Rome's unwillingness to cooperate with the Protestant Churches nor the Protestant Churches' unwillingness to cooperate with Rome but the Protestant Churches' unwillingness to cooperate with each other. There was no felt need to cooperate and there was definite disagreement about eucharistic sharing. A deep-seated denominationalism, a sense of self-sufficiency comparable indeed to that of the Roman Catholic Church, enabled the Protestant Churches to ignore each other. As Ian Ellis writes: The Irish Protestant Churches were 'long-established and numerically and financially strong... they could afford disunity'.²³ Eric Gallagher in his lectures used to tell how, when he began his ministry in Belfast in the late 30s, a Presbyterian and Methodist minister meeting each other in the street might stop and chat, how both would have thought all the proprieties observed if the Church of Ireland Rector meeting either of them had simply nodded and passed on and how the appearance of their Roman Catholic counterpart would lead him and any of the Protestant ministers to turn aside in embarrassment and look into a shop window to avoid meeting each other. At the 'Irish Amsterdam' meeting Eric Gallagher found that the Regius Professor of Divinity at TCD had not previously met the Principals of the Presbyterian and Methodist Theological Colleges in Belfast.

II. UNOFFICIAL MOVES:

FROM GLENSTAL TO BALLYMASCANLON

The unofficial steps which led the Irish Catholic and Protestant Churches out of their isolationism, which prepared the way for Ballymascanlon 1973 were surely legion. Four are singled out here for special mention: A) The Glenstal and Greenhills Conferences, B) The Corrymeela Community C) The Irish School of Ecumenics and D) The Charismatic Renewal. These four are singled out because they seem to deserve it, because I have myself had some personal involvement however limited in all four and because these four have already been the subject of research and writing so that materials are available about them.²⁴ An additional common feature of these four examples is that they pre-dated 'The Troubles', the outbreak of violent conflict in Northern Ireland in 1968 between Catholic/Nationalists and Protestant/Unionists. Whereas, as we shall see, official ecumenical activity owes its development if not its origins to 'The Troubles', this

is not true of the unofficial initiatives treated here.

IIA GLENSTAL AND GREENHILLS

Had it not been for Glenstal in particular and to a lesser extent Greenhills, it is doubtful if the Ballymascanlon meetings would have come into being with so little opposition.²⁵

So said John Barkley. But what and where are Glenstal and Greenhills? They are annual inter-denominational theological conferences which have come to be known by their locations: Glenstal in Co. Limerick and Greenhills in Co. Louth.

Glenstal originated out of a mixed lay-clerical group of Dublin Catholic intellectuals interested in religion and theology. They were all male and twelve in number but became known not as the Twelve Apostles, as might have been expected, but as Flannery's Harriers.²⁶ Beginning in Unity Week 1963 some of the 'Harriers', with the help of Archbishop Simms of Dublin, developed contacts with Church of Ireland clergy. These meetings being very successful they approached the Benedictine Abbot of Glenstal with the suggestion that the Abbey's Liturgical Congress in Low Week 1964 on the subject of Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, promulgated the previous December, be opened to 'non-Catholics'. The Abbot, Dom Joseph Dowdall,²⁷ replied with the alternative suggestion that Glenstal host a separate ecumenical conference on the subject of the Liturgy. This happened on 23-24 June 1964 with Methodists and Presbyterians participating as well as members of the Church of Ireland. Since then the Glenstal Ecumenical Conference has been an annual Summer event. The subject of course has varied from year to year but the treatment is always theological, the speakers and participants representative not only of the 'main-line' Churches but of all the different traditions.

The first Greenhills Conference took place two years later, in January 1966. It was the Rev Dr J G McGarry of St Patrick's College, Maynooth, who did so much to encourage the cause of Church renewal in Ireland - especially by founding *The Furrow* - who originally had the idea. A one-day, interchurch conference during the January Unity Week in a location more readily accessible to participants from Northern Ireland would, he felt, be appropriate and meet a real need. He it was who suggested the location: a recently established Secondary School, situated off the beaten track a few miles

north of Drogheda, run by the Presentation Sisters who were happy to make the premises available on the Monday in Unity Week and to involve their senior pupils in welcoming the participants. Some original hesitation on the part of Archbishop McCann in whose diocese Greenhills was located seems to have been overcome through the influence of Archbishop Simms.²⁸

Down the years Greenhills like Glenstal has addressed a variety of theological subjects and done so in a context of joint worship. The residential character of the Glenstal Conference and its longer duration have however enabled it, as John Barkley wrote in the passage quoted, to be of greater influence. Both however were conceived as inter-denominational or multilateral and have remained so and this characteristic is worthy of special mention not only for its own sake but because it was the particular feature which paved the way for Ballymascanlon.

Not everyone was originally enthusiastic with the idea that the Glenstal Conference include Methodists and Presbyterians as well as members of the Church of Ireland, that it be multilateral rather than bilateral. Some resistance had to be overcome on the understandable grounds that this move might slow down the progress already made between Roman Catholics and the Church of Ireland. On the other hand, although we Roman Catholics knew very little at that stage about how much we had in common with our fellow non-conformists, any exclusiveness seemed anathema to us in the first flush of our ecumenical enthusiasm and our slender resources seemed to offer little prospect of separate bilateral meetings with Methodists and with Presbyterians. While in the beginning 'Flannery's Harriers' provided the nucleus of the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland participants, it was left to me originally to invite the Methodists and Presbyterians whom I had come to know as a result of the publication of *Towards Christian Unity* in 1960 and of *Praying for Unity* in 1963. The 'Introduction' to the published proceedings of the first Conferences gave me the opportunity to offer the following defence.

The multilateral character of the conferences which beforehand may have seemed too bold for a beginning, too likely to be an obstacle to real dialogue, proved rather to be a help and an enrichment. It also made them an interesting and perhaps valuable experiment for those in the non-Roman Churches who are now wondering whether their official unity conversations should be bilateral, or multilateral.²⁹

IIB. CORRYMEELA

No Irish name is more widely known in ecumenical circles, inside or outside Ireland, than Corrymeela. It is our Irish Taize; Reformed/Presbyterian in the person of its founder, Rev Dr Ray Davey, inter-denominational as well as international in its outreach, but differing from Taize in being a dispersed rather than a residential community, a dispersed community which originally was mostly if not entirely Protestant but is now half Protestant and half Catholic.

Corrymeela is an impressive place, not so much the complex of buildings as their location: perched on the top of a windswept cliff in a beautiful corner of our North Antrim coast, looking out across the waters of Moyle to the island of Rathlin and the coast of Scotland. But as an ecumenical venture Corrymeela, which may mean 'hill of harmony', is still more impressive. Ray Davey, the founder who grew up in 'a pan-Presbyterian world'³⁰, learnt his ecumenism the hard way as a chaplain in North Africa, Italy and Germany during World War II. On his return home, he became chaplain to Queen's University Belfast and in October 1965 he opened the Corrymeela Centre 'as a place for Christian Reconciliation in Ireland'.

Corrymeela was inter-denominational in its outreach from the beginning. Bishop Farquhar of Down and Connor who became Assistant Roman Catholic Chaplain at Queen's University Belfast in 1970, recalls that there was interchaplaincy encouragement for its student programmes, especially its Christmeet and Eastermeet.³¹ I find among my own papers a letter dated 21 February 1968³² inviting me to encourage Roman Catholic participation in its Family Weeks and its Work Camps.

In his chapter on 'Ecumenism in Northern Ireland' in the booklet *Ecumenism in Ireland: Experiments and Achievements 1968-1980* Eric Gallagher gives 'pride of place' to Corrymeela under the heading 'Unofficial Christian Action' as 'probably first in the field and certainly best known inside and outside Ireland'. Corrymeela is ecumenically significant in the first place because the suspicion of proselytism which traditionally has hung like a cloud over all Irish inter-denominational meeting and mixing has never attached to it. The distinction between ecumenism and proselytism - encouraging and enabling practicing Christians to change their church allegiance - is crucial. The distinction was clarified and established and not without some difficulty by the World Council of Churches and by the Second Vatican Council. If Corrymeela, unlike the charismatic movement (as

we shall see), has managed to avoid the suspicion of proselytism, it is worth recalling that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has never wavered in its conviction that the Roman Catholic Church is 'a part of the Church of Christ' and that in 1873 its 'Irish Mission' took as its aim 'not so much the bringing of converts from the Church of Rome as the bringing of sinners to Christ'.³³

Corrymeela is ecumenically significant in the second place because of the enlargement and enrichment which the term 'reconciliation' brings. The Christian Unity movement has given many people the impression that it is mainly concerned about the doctrinal issues of Faith and Order - such as the meaning of justification - and not too much concerned about the practical issues of Life and Work, such as justice and peace. The movement has suffered as a result. The term 'reconciliation' has the advantage of being able to transcend this dichotomy, it is more 'user-friendly'. The vision and programme it unfolds address the needs of the Irish Church perceptively and comprehensively.

IIC. IRISH SCHOOL OF ECUMENICS

The ecumenical movement in its various expressions such as Glenstal and Greenhills and Corrymeela has thrown new light on many old theological problems such as the nature of the eucharist. In addition it has raised many new theological problems such as the nature of human rights and the place and role of forgiveness in reconciliation. Granted therefore the Church's great tradition of devotion to the search for truth, to research and study, granted that existing theological institutions could not for a variety of reasons be expected to cope satisfactorily with the results of the rapidly expanding ecumenical movement, it was to be expected that the movement itself would produce new ecumenical study-centres of various sorts - at Bossey near Geneva, at Paderborn in Germany, at Strasbourg in France, at Tantur in Israel and in Ireland, the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE).

Inaugurated in 1970 by the General Secretary of the WCC, Rev Dr Eugene Carson Blake,³⁴ ISE helped to pave the way for Ballymascanlon by taking a multilateral approach to interchurch relations. It is not under denominational auspices as Paderborn is under Roman Catholic and Strasbourg under Lutheran auspices. ISE's four original Patrons were Bishop John Armstrong of the Church of Ireland, Rev Professor John Barkley of the Presbyterian Church, Rev Cecil McGarry, SJ of the

Roman Catholic Church and Rev Robert A Nelson of the Methodist Church, all serving in a personal capacity so that ISE is not an official interchurch institute as Bossey is. ISE, like Ballymascanlon, remains committed to multilateralism in interchurch relations.

ISE also helped to pave the way for Ballymascanlon by its emphasis on study and on joint study, by the comprehensiveness of its approach which includes Interchurch Relations, Interfaith Relations and Peace Studies and by the scholarly character of the approach it has taken to all these ecumenical issues. From the beginning ISE elaborated a systematic programme of study leading to a Master's degree and sought university affiliation which was granted in 1971 by the University of Hull through the good offices of the Chairman of its Theology Department who was an Irish Anglican, Rev Professor Anthony Hanson. By the summer of 1973 ISE had appointed three staff members and prepared a research programme on the topic of Mixed Marriages. This formed the basis of the International Consultation on Mixed Marriage which ISE sponsored in September of the following year³⁵ and which would prepare the way for Ballymascanlon to address this delicate, controversial issue in due course.³⁶

IID. CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT³⁷

The contribution of the charismatic movement to ecumenism and to Ballymascanlon 'is difficult to assess'. So in their survey of ecumenical *Experiments and Achievements* in the whole country, North and South, over the period 1968-1980,³⁸ write Michael Ledwith and Eric Gallagher. Eric Gallagher regrets that the charismatic movement seems to have had no obvious 'effect or influence on political thinking and community attitudes' but this would appear to misunderstand or overestimate its proper role. Michael Ledwith notes 'a slight tendency to avoid extending the ecumenical aspect of the Movement any further'.³⁹ But this is surely disingenuous if, as seems to be the case, the tendency was the result of Roman Catholic policy. For a variety of reasons Church authorities in many part of the world made deliberate efforts from the late 70s to contain the inter-denominational character of the movement and to develop instead the 'Catholic Charismatic Renewal'. According to one commentator 'Ireland was the only country to establish an ecumenical national service committee but this was later abandoned in the face of Catholic pressures'.⁴⁰ Due account must of course be taken of the fact that the Protestants then chiefly involved in the charismatic movement did not belong to the so-called 'main-line churches', did not subscribe therefore to the principles of the ecumenical movement and its guidelines on proselytism. In any

case 'charismatic renewal', according to one commentator, 'uncover unacknowledged or only partially admitted reservations about ecumenism itself'.⁴¹

However despite their reservations neither Michael Ledwith nor Eric Gallagher has any doubt that the charismatic movement deserves mention, appreciative mention, in any survey of ecumenical 'experiments and achievements' during the 70s. 'Probably no other group draws its members so widely from all the Christian Churches'⁴²; 'it must certainly have a place - and an important one - in the Reconciliation Role of Honour'.⁴³ It must therefore be included in this present limited survey of significant, unofficial contacts during the pre-1973 period. It was precisely in the early 70s that the Rev Cecil Kerr of the Church of Ireland began to dream dreams about a residential charismatic community 'where people from all backgrounds could come together, not to argue or debate but in an atmosphere of prayer'⁴⁴ and it was in November 1973 that he discovered the property overlooking Carlingford Lough at Rostrevor into which he moved the following August and which has become the Christian Renewal Centre⁴⁵. It was in the early 70s also that charismatic prayer meetings started up in a number of locations in Dublin.⁴⁶ It was in February 1973 that Charles Lamb helped to make available to them the Friends Meeting House in Eustace Street, which subsequently became the leading Dublin centre. It was on Pentecost Sunday 1973 that some 2000 charismatic people, Catholic and Protestant from the North and from the South, came together on the Hill of Slane to pray for peace.⁴⁷

The charismatic movement of the early 70s has not fulfilled all the hopes and expectations placed in it but it certainly helped to pave the way for the official, interchurch contacts inaugurated at Ballymascanlon in 1973. Indeed the very success of the charismatic movement as an inter-denominational phenomenon, the speed with which it happened and the nervousness this aroused in Roman Catholic authorities, may well have been - so at least it has sometimes been asserted - a contributory factor spurring them to become more closely involved in the whole ecumenical movement in order to be better placed to influence it.

III. OFFICIAL MOVES:

FROM GREYSTONES TO BALLYMASCANLON

According to Ian Ellis 'the degree to which the Roman Catholic Church officially and institutionally identified with Vatican II's new

approaches to the whole area of ecumenism' is 'the real test'.⁴⁸ The same in a sense will be true of the other Churches: for them too 'the real test' of their ecumenical sincerity is their official involvement with the Roman Catholic Church. Official relationships or rather relationships which are official on both sides are the subject of this Part III.

GREYSTONES 1963

Just ten years before Ballymascanlon 1973 the UCCC held a Conference at Greystones, Co. Wicklow which at the time seemed so significant that I included it as an Appendix to *Praying for Unity*⁴⁹, published in December 1963 with a Foreword by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor and 'Introductory Messages' from the Methodist President, the Presbyterian Moderator and the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin.⁵⁰ Ten years later the Greystones Conference still seemed so significant that the paragraph on Ballymascanlon 1973 in the first issue of the School of Ecumenics newsletter, *Unity is* entitled 'From Greystones to Dundalk' and reads as follows:

In late September 1963 the United Council of Churches and Religious Communions in Ireland held a conference at Greystones and recommended to its members the following measures among others: 'to make the United Council of Churches in Ireland a more effective instrument of common action. . . to consider in what ways we ought to respond in truth and love to our Roman Catholic brethren who express their sense of fellowship with us'. Just ten years afterwards, in late September 1973, the member Churches of the United Council (now re-constituted as the Irish Council of Churches and given a full-time secretary) met at Dundalk with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. While we may regret that a decade had to elapse and violence to erupt before this historic event could take place, we must also remember that the intervening years saw considerable preparatory work being done in the areas of Church renewal and interchurch dialogue.

The fact of this Greystones conference does find mention in the booklet on the *Irish Council of Churches 1923-1983* 51 by John Barkley but not in the section dealing with 'Relations with the Roman Catholic Church'. It finds no mention in the relevant chapter of Gallagher and Worrall and only a bare mention in Ian Ellis.⁵² In his recent memoir

however, Rev Dr Carlisle Patterson who was the first part-time secretary of UCCC, makes more than one mention of Greystones.⁵³ To the best of my knowledge it is here at Greystones that we find the first reference by the Irish Protestant Churches at an official level to the desirability of a new relationship with Roman Catholics if not the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁴

The effect of Greystones was to encourage individual members of the Protestant Churches to engage in dialogue with Roman Catholics, for example, at Glenstal where, as have seen, the annual conferences began in 1964. Doubtless it also helped to get the following paragraph included in the Declaration of Intent published in March 1968 by the Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians about to engage in the Tripartite Conversations:

As we seek together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the unity which Christ wills according to the Scriptures, we are not concerned for ourselves alone. We will welcome an approach to our Churches by any other Christian Church or Communion which wishes to join in the quest for this unity.⁵⁵

But while Greystones seems to have had no immediate effect on UCCC as such it did have a significant effect on the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, its largest and most prominent member, at least in a Northern Ireland context. This encourages me in my belief that the journey to Ballymascanlon began at Greystones.

PRESBYTERIAN REACTIONS TO GREYSTONES

Carlisle Patterson notes⁵⁶ that it was in response to the Greystones Conference that the Presbyterian Inter-Church Relations Committee drew up a Statement on 'Relations between Presbyterian and Roman Catholics' which elicited a generally positive reaction from Presbyteries and which led to the approval by General Assembly in 1965 of the following remarkable resolution:

The Assembly agreed to 'urge upon our own people humbly and frankly to acknowledge and to ask forgiveness for any attitudes and actions towards our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen which have been unworthy of our calling as followers of Jesus Christ; and that the Assembly call upon our people to resolve to deal with all conflicts of interests, loyalties and beliefs always in the spirit of charity rather than of suspicion and intolerance, and in accordance with truth as set forth in the Scriptures'.

It was Carlisle Patterson himself who proposed this resolution which 'even thirty years later', he writes, 'reads as a very remarkable pronouncement... I scarcely believed that our Resolution would win sufficient support. I still look back on this moment as one of the high points of my time as Inter-Church Relations Convener, perhaps even of my whole ministry'.

THE TROUBLES AND BALLYMASCANLON

But if Greystones 1963 was the starting point for the Protestant Churches' journey to Dundalk and Ballymascanlon in 1973, this journey not only turned out to be a long one but it also took a circuitous and tortuous route: it led through Northern Ireland; the Churches arrived at their destination by forced marches, as it were, only as a result of violence. As Gallagher and Worrall note, it was 'non-theological factors' which drew the Churches 'to actions they might never have taken otherwise.'" If the official phase of the movement had already begun, it took the Troubles, the outbreak of sectarian violence, to get it under way and to gather speed. 'There can be little doubt', the ICC Report for 1974 states, 'that the experience of the past few years helped to bring it [Ballymascanlon] about'.⁵⁸

The Troubles, or that phase of them which happily at the time of writing has just come to an end, are generally agreed to have begun with the Civil Rights march of 5 October 1968 in that Northern Ireland city which, in the Church context of this paper, may without embarrassment, I hope, be named Derry because so it has always been named in official Church parlance.⁵⁹ This however is not the place to rehearse in any detail the events of ecumenical significance which took place in the years 1968-1973 but some comments will be in order.

The Churches were caught unprepared. The structures were not yet in place by which they could have coped more satisfactorily. Indeed the main achievement of these years was to experiment with such structures. By 1968 the Anglican and Methodist Churches had set up international commissions for bilateral conversations with the Roman Catholic Churches. The Presbyterians did likewise in 1970. By 1968 the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the British Council of Churches (BCC) had set up joint Working Groups with the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁰ The Irish Council of Churches (ICC) however did not set up a similar group. Indeed it had been approached by the BCC about the possibility of Irish involvement in their group but had given a negative reply.⁶¹ The Church of Ireland, its Primate, Archbishop

McCann, if not the whole House of Bishops, had also been negative about Bishop Henry McAdoo of Ossory becoming a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission.⁶² In late June 1968 the Presbyterian Moderator, Dr Jack Withers, had to withdraw his acceptance of an invitation to come for lunch with the other three Church Leaders at the Greenhills Conference the following January. The invitation was for lunch only and the other three leaders had agreed to come but his Presbyterian advisers persuaded Dr Withers to change his mind.⁶³

For its part the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, despite the stimulus of the Second Vatican Council, was no more enthusiastic about an official relationship with the other Churches than these Churches themselves were. The Hierarchy did give approval to my membership of the Methodist/Roman Catholic International Commission (I joined in 1968) and in June 1967 they did appoint a panel of consultants to prepare 'a National Directory for the practice of ecumenism based on the general directory recently [1967] published by the Holy See'. But when this National Directory appeared in January 1969 it received a very negative review in *Hibernia*: it 'leaves much to be desired. It makes no reference to ecumenical structures'.⁶⁴

'THE SHORT PERIOD OF HOPE'

On the other hand, as we have seen, much ecumenical progress had been made at an unofficial level and Dr John Dunlop, former Presbyterian Moderator, can refer to the years 1965 to 1968 as 'the short period of hope'.⁶⁵ It was in February 1968 that the Principal (Professor J L M Haire) and staff of Union Theological College invited me to lecture their students on the Catholic doctrine of Baptism - only however to have to defend themselves subsequently at General Assembly in June when a motion censuring them was happily defeated.⁶⁶ It was also in 1968 that my edition of *John Wesley's Letter to a Roman Catholic* appeared with Prefaces by the Presidents of the World Methodist Council and of the Vatican Unity Secretariat under the joint imprint of Geoffrey Chapman and Epworth House Belfast.⁶⁷ So much progress had in fact been made that, when the Troubles broke out, the Churches did not take sides as they had done in the Home Rule crisis at the beginning of the century and as, according to Gallagher and Worrall, they would have done a decade earlier.⁶⁸ So much unofficial ecumenical progress had been made that 'the Churches were more ready than the political parties to stretch out

hands of friendship'.⁶⁹ And in 1968 ICC had appointed as its 'Organizing Secretary', although only in a part-time capacity, the Rev Dr Norman Taggart of the Methodist Church in Ireland; he was to be 'travelling advocate and interpreter of ecumenism... monitoring the new relationships, both official and unofficial, between the Irish Churches including the Roman Catholic Church'.⁷⁰

CHURCH LEADERS' MEETINGS

The emergence in 1968 of the four Church Leaders as a working group is generally regarded as the first sign of official Catholic-Protestant cooperation. This took place on the initiative of Eric Gallagher, then Methodist President.⁷¹ In succeeding years joint statements by the four of them (at first signed separately), joint television appearances (at first addressing the chairperson rather than each other) and joint consultations gradually became commonplace.⁷² The first such meeting seems to have taken place on 31 January 1969.⁷³ It took place in response to a letter sent to Cardinal Conway 'earnestly and urgently' suggesting 'some type of joint consultative body from our respective Churches'. There were seven signatories to the letter, the leaders of the constituent Churches of ICC. They wrote 'as persons holding positions of major responsibility in our respective Churches'. They included of course the Church of Ireland Primate, the Presbyterian Moderator and the Methodist President.⁷⁴ The letter is dated 7 January 1969. The Troubles, it will be remembered, were escalating: at the New Year the People's Democracy march from Belfast to Derry had taken place, ending in 'the bloody encounter at Burntollet'.⁷⁵ The letter looks more like a Church Leaders' initiative taken at the prompting of Eric Gallagher, the Methodist President, than an ICC initiative. Happily Eric Gallagher was also that year Chairman of ICC.

JOINT [ICC-RC] GROUP

Then on 8 May 1970, 'after months of imaginative consideration had been given to effective forms of contact with the Roman Catholic Church',⁷⁶ after a further escalation of the Troubles, the resignation of Terence O'Neill as Prime Minister (April 1969) and the arrival in August 1969 of British Troops to maintain law and order, came the announcement of the establishment of the joint [ICC-RC] Group.

On 1 May 1969 the Spring meeting of ICC had instructed its Executive to report on how to set up a full study of the role the Churches could and should play in Irish society. A few weeks later, on 29 May, the

Executive recommended that Council set up a Working Party 'to consider... tensions and misunderstandings and their underlying causes and to [show] how the Churches may promote justice for all sections of the community and fulfil a reconciling ministry'. In March 1970 as a result of discussions on 'The Future of the Council', chaired by Eric Gallagher, Council resolved that a full-time Executive Officer be appointed, that 'constructive attention' be given to relationships with the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland and that to further this aim 'a proposal to establish joint working parties on specific problems should be made to the Roman Catholic bishops'.⁷⁷ As recorded in the Minutes of the March 1970 Council meeting, this latter proposal gives examples 'such as housing, world poverty, causes of tension in the community, Faith and Order etc.' In the minutes of the Executive meeting on 8 April the phrase used is 'on social and human problems'.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOINT GROUP

But when the establishment of the joint Group was announced in May 1970 its terms of reference fell short of those agreed by the ICC in March. The Minutes and documents from the March and June 1970 meetings of the Hierarchy contain no reference to the establishment of the joint Group. The matter may, despite this silence, still have been discussed.⁷⁸ Reservations must have been expressed, at least by the Northern Bishops. The announcement made simultaneously on 8 May by the Vice-Chairman, Archbishop Simms and by Cardinal Conway reads as follows:

The Executive Committee of the Irish Council of Churches, with the approval of the Council, has agreed to a proposal to set up a joint Group to be appointed by the member Churches of the Council and the Irish Hierarchy to advise on the role of the Churches in Irish society on such matters as world poverty, employment and housing conditions, drug addiction, alcoholism etc. It is envisaged that Working Parties will be set up on individual topics.⁷⁹

I distinctly remember Bishop John Armstrong of the Church of Ireland sharing with me his disappointment at these terms of reference but taking some hope from the 'etc.' 'Causes of tension in the community' and 'Faith and Order' were conspicuous by their absence as possible topics.

The Joint Group when formed was an advisory body of about thirty members, half Protestant, half Roman Catholic, but not including any

senior Church figures, apart from Eric Gallagher. It included no bishop either Church of Ireland or Roman Catholic. It did appoint working parties which represented South as well as North but the Group itself was overwhelmingly, indeed almost exclusively, Northern in its membership. Its first Report issued in March 1972 ends with the following paragraph, notable perhaps for its defensive tone:

In normal times the work of the joint Group would have been acknowledged as important for the life of the nation as a whole and the Churches' place in that life. In the context of the present upheaval, however, it might appear to some that we have been concerning ourselves almost with trifles. It is nonetheless astonishing that we have met at all - in view of the disintegration going on around us - and we have continued to do so regularly not only in the Group itself, but also in its working parties.⁸⁰

VIOLENCE IN IRELAND WORKING PARTY

In the event the main significance of the joint Group proved to be in the 'etc.' included in its terms of reference. Some though not all of its members did feel that it was too concerned 'with trifles', that its work should be 'much more directly related to the continuing political and community crisis within Ireland'.⁸¹ Eventually the 'etc' at the end of its terms of reference enabled the working party 'On Violence in Ireland'⁸² to be appointed but not until 1973. Its two chairmen were highly influential, senior figures in church circles: the Roman Catholic being a bishop, the Most Rev Cahal B Daly, then in the diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois; and the Protestant being Dr Eric Gallagher. The Report, *Violence in Ireland*, the obvious fruit of much vigorous thinking, was published in 1976 but for the most part its challenging recommendations have never been implemented.

BACKGROUND TO BALLYMASCANLON

The third example of official Catholic-Protestant cooperation was the 1973 initiative which came to be known as the 'Ballymascanlon Talks' and the jubilee of which this essay and this booklet are commemorating. August 1971 had brought the introduction of internment without trial but the army's dawn swoops on the morning of the 9th to arrest hundreds of suspected IRA members had left 22 people killed (including one Catholic priest) and 7000 homeless.⁸³ In

December the Executive Committee of the British Council of Churches in a statement markedly more forthright than a previous one in 1969 had urged

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 people 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.⁸⁴

The early months of 1972 saw Bloody Sunday (when thirteen men were shot dead and seventeen wounded by the army in Derry), the suspension of the Northern Ireland parliament at Stormont and the imposition of Direct Rule from Westminster. In March 1972 at its Spring Meeting the Executive Committee of ICC declared: 'We are called therefore to courageous, costly and possibly unpopular action on behalf of all including those represented by our member Churches'.⁸⁵ The Organizing Secretary wrote to the Cardinal in February 1972 about a Church of Ireland suggestion of a joint working party on mixed marriages⁸⁶ and about 'the possibilities of further dialogue on both practical and doctrinal issues'.⁸⁷ He met the Cardinal on 23 February. They had discussed, so he informed the Spring meeting of the Council on 29 March,

pastoral and other factors involved in interchurch marriages, violence, the relationship between the ICC and the Roman Catholic structures and the terms of reference of the joint Group.⁸⁸

The Organizing Secretary had broached the possibility of setting up a working party which would discuss joint pastoral problems, including mixed marriages and violence in Ireland.⁸⁹ In a letter to the *Belfast Telegraph* he clarified that

What is now envisaged is an extension of such cooperation [as already exists] to make possible joint study of the pastoral problems that arise from interchurch marriages and the moral issues raised by violence in all its forms and also an examination of subjects which may give rise to tensions and misunderstandings which are unworthy of the relationship between different Christian Churches.⁹⁰

REPLY OF THE HIERARCHY

What happened as a result of this intervention by the ICC Organizing Secretary is recorded as follows by John Barkley:

On 17th July, 1972, the Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church responded to an overture from the ICC 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'.⁹¹

The ICC Report itself writes of 'overtures from members of the Council'⁹² rather than 'an overture from ICC.' and this is more in accord with the contents of the Organizing Secretary's letter.

The response from the Episcopal Conference came not, as has previously been thought, from Armagh but from Mullingar, not from the Primate but from the Secretary of the Irish Hierarchy, the Bishop of Meath, Dr McCormack, and deserves to be quoted in full:

At a meeting of the Irish Episcopal Conference held last month the bishops decided to invite representatives of the Protestant Churches in Ireland to a joint meeting at which the whole field of ecumenism in Ireland might be surveyed.

What is contemplated is a general review of relations between the Christian Churches in Ireland and the possibilities of further dialogue on both practical and doctrinal issues, including the various matters raised in Reverend Norman Taggart's letter of the 16th February last. It is envisaged that working parties might subsequently be set up to further such dialogue.

It was suggested that the good offices of the Irish Council of Churches might be availed of to arrange for a corresponding representative group of its member Churches to attend such a meeting with the Irish Episcopal Conference. The time and place of the meeting would be a matter for subsequent arrangement. As to time, what the bishops have in mind is some time after their next meeting which takes place early in October.

I would be grateful if you would be good enough to convey this invitation to your members and, if they are agreeable, to let me know their initial views as to suitable times and places.⁹³

At the November 1972 meeting of ICC this invitation was 'favourably

received' and 'warmly welcomed' and referred to as 'one of the most progressive moves made in Ireland'.⁹⁴ The Hierarchy however had not reckoned with the fact that the governing bodies of some of the Churches, the Methodists and Presbyterians in particular, had just met and would not be meeting again until the following Summer so that some official responses would have to wait until then and the meeting envisaged would therefore be delayed from early till late 1973 and the agenda would, to allay Presbyterian fears, have to exclude discussions on Church Union.

'THE WHOLE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE'

Preparations however went ahead. In September the ICC Executive had appointed a Committee to meet Bishop McCormack and specifically to ask about ICC representation. Cardinal Conway joined Bishop McCormack for the meeting and it was stressed that the invitation was 'to meet the whole Episcopal Conference and was to the member Churches' but ICC representatives would be welcome if a request for their presence came from the member Churches.⁹⁵

The Catholic hierarchy as a whole and the comprehensive nature of the proposed agenda are truly remarkable in themselves and especially by contrast with the composition and the restrictive terms of reference of the 1970 Joint Group. According to the minutes of the Episcopal Conference⁹⁶ the March meeting

decided that the proposal to have a working party with the Irish Council of Churches to consider the pastoral and other factors involved in interchurch marriages and other ecumenical contacts be referred to the Commission on Ecumenism for a report to the General Meeting in June.

In June

The Report of the Commission on Ecumenism was noted.

The proposal of a joint Working Party, as suggested in the letter of Rev Norman Taggart, Secretary, Irish Council of Churches, was postponed to a later meeting.

It was *decided* that a formal invitation be issued through the Irish Council of Churches for a joint meeting of a Representative group from each of their member Churches with the Episcopal Conference on the entire range of ecumenical questions in Ireland.

According to Bishop Smith, who was present as Secretary to Bishop

McCormack, the discussion 'was moving along when one Bishop suggested that rather than setting up a working party a wider meeting should be suggested. This found unanimous agreement.'⁹⁷ According to Cardinal Daly the decision reached about a wider meeting rather than a working party was due 'almost entirely' to 'a recommendation from Cardinal Conway'.⁹⁸ This unanimous decision will have been particularly welcome to the newest member of the Hierarchy, Archbishop Dermot Ryan of Dublin who was ordained to the episcopate in Rome on 13 February 1972. A Professor of Oriental Languages at University College, Dublin who had been active in the Irish Theological Association and given a paper at the 1965 Glenstal Conference, he never as Archbishop made any secret of his view that Irish ecumenism was far too preoccupied with Northern Ireland and with the issue of mixed marriages.⁹⁹ He will have been very pleased with the comprehensive scope of the Ballymascanlon agenda, with its omission of any explicit reference to mixed marriages, with the high level composition of the meeting itself and of the working parties it set up. These were four in number corresponding to the themes of the four sessions of the one-day meeting on 26 September: Church, Scripture, Authority; Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage; Social and Community Problems, Christianity and Secularism.

All twenty eight Catholic Bishops attended the first Ballymascanlon meeting accompanied by fourteen others: four Maynooth professors, two other diocesan priests (both from Belfast), two members of religious communities (one priest, one sister) and six lay persons, one of them a woman from Belfast. In the following years however the number of bishops attending seems to have decreased and the number of 'others' to have increased. This will have given a truer picture of the Catholic Church, more in accordance with the insights of Vatican II. The Catholic partner however was still 'the Hierarchy' because all the others were mandated by them.

IV CONCLUSION

The reply of the Episcopal Conference to the request conveyed in the letter of the ICC Organizing Secretary was richly imaginative. As a result hopes were high in September 1973. But imaginative vision needs to be accompanied by methodological expertise if it is to become a reality. After the first meeting a realist might have been forgiven for thinking that little or nothing would result, that the Ballymascanlon Talks were unlikely to survive, much less succeed in being in any way effective.

INFRASTRUCTURE?

Firstly there was no infrastructure in place and at the very beginning the Bishop of Kerry had warned:

If this is to be an effective instrument in rebuilding society, I submit that further structures need to be created for the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the Joint Group, and these structures must have the effective backing of the full authority of the Churches.¹⁰⁰

Bishop Casey was referring to the joint Group appointed in 1970. His statement however applied *a fortiori* to the work of Ballymascanlon. The need was not only for implementation bodies but for administrative facilities, secretarial services.

As he was about to leave office in April 1972 the ICC Organizing Secretary was sharply critical of the member Churches of ICC for their 'lack of seriousness' and for their attitude to ICC as 'a convenient and harmless talk-shop into which 'ecumeniacs' could safely be diverted, whilst the real work of God was believed to be carried on much better through the denominational machinery for which God himself was personally responsible'. In his address at the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the ICC, Dr Norman Taggart then President of the Methodist Church in Ireland recalled his years as Organizing Secretary of ICC from 1968 to 1972 and re-echoed these criticisms.¹⁰¹ In 1972 the ICC had only just appointed its first full-time secretary, Rev Ralph Baxter of the Church of Ireland. It was about to rent office space at 99 Botanic Avenue in Belfast¹⁰² but it would be altogether beyond the capacity of any one individual to service the four working parties set up by Ballymascanlon 1973 and these were additional to those appointed by the joint Group which were growing in number.¹⁰³

For its part the Hierarchy had already appointed full-time Executive Secretaries for some of its Commissions, the Commission on the Laity, for instance, and the Justice and Peace Commission¹⁰⁴ but in 1972 it had declined to do likewise for its Episcopal Commission on Ecumenism and its related Advisory Committee on Ecumenism.¹⁰⁵ The ICC full-time secretary therefore would have no exact counterpart in the Roman Catholic Church. In October 1973 the size and membership of the four Ballymascanlon working parties still remained to be decided.¹⁰⁶ Because of the endemic Catholic reluctance to devolve and the oil crisis now looming, the realist in late 1973 would see little prospect that Ballymascanlon would ever be properly resourced. 'We

are still waiting', Daly and Worrall wrote in 1978, 'for an adequate response to Dr Casey's plea'.¹⁰⁷ In 1979 and 1980 complaints were still being made about more adequate servicing arrangements and machinery for the implementation of recommendations.¹⁰⁸

ECUMENICAL METHODOLOGY

The odds against Ballymascanlon being effective or even surviving were not only organizational. They were also ecumenical, at least at the methodological level. It was not until February 1975 that the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity issued the important document entitled 'Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National and Local Levels' (EC); but the document had been in preparation since June 1971 and Bishop Cahal Daly became a member of the Secretariat in 1973, if not earlier.¹⁰⁹ EC is very positive about collaboration and very imaginative and generous in the variety of examples and models which it offers for consideration. In July 1971 the ICC Organizing Secretary had attended an international consultation on 'Rethinking the Role of Christian Councils Today' and had subsequently written an article on 'Roman Catholic Involvement in Councils of Churches'.¹¹⁰ At that time, in 1975, the Roman Catholic Church was already a member of 19 out of a total of some 80 National Councils of Churches. EC's positive stance to such membership meant that this number was likely to grow. And grow it did, so that at present the Roman Catholic Church is a member of about 50 out of a total of some 90 National Councils.¹¹¹

For a variety of reasons however it was not to be expected in 1973 that the Roman Catholic Hierarchy would request membership of ICC or that ICC would welcome such an application. But the March 1973 issue of a new Irish religious periodical *Today* did in fact carry two articles cautiously favourable to such a development. One was by the theologian, Cecil McGarry, then Provincial Superior of the Irish Jesuits, Chairman of the Academic Council of the Irish School of Ecumenics and one of the two members of religious communities present at Ballymascanlon 1973. The other author was none other than Norman Taggart, by then no longer Organizing Secretary of ICC but on the staff of the Methodist Missionary Society in London and writing, as he emphasized, in a personal capacity.¹¹² 'I believe', he wrote, 'that RC membership within the ICC would be a significant step forward since the ICC is the major official ecumenical body'.¹¹³

JOINT WORKING GROUP

Where Roman Catholic membership of a Council was not immediately envisaged, the model of joint Working Group (JWG) was frequently adopted, notably by the World Council of Churches and by the British Council of Churches. According to one commentator

[JWG] would seem to be particularly well suited to the initial phase of official Roman Catholic participation in the ecumenical movement, especially where it is not immediately evident what precise form full Roman Catholic involvement should take, and where the provisional character of a JWG gives flexibility and permits a degree of experimentation.¹¹⁴

Having in May 1970 adopted a certain restricted form of JWG, a reconstruction of this already existing instrument might have been more satisfactory in June 1972. It would surely have been less likely to frighten the Presbyterians as the Hierarchy's broad invitation certainly did. A removal of the restriction to social problems would have given the Group sufficient scope, allowing the inclusion of working parties on 'both practical and doctrinal issues', such as those set up after Ballymascanlon 1973, while excluding the discussions or negotiations about Church Union which the Presbyterians feared and formally excluded.¹¹⁵ This would have been more in accordance with what the ICC Organizing Secretary conveyed in his February letter and the consideration of which 'was postponed' by the June 1972 meeting of the Hierarchy.¹¹⁶ And it might well have been more in accordance with what the Hierarchy's Commission on Ecumenism originally recommended in its Report which the June meeting 'noted'.¹¹⁷

Ballymascanlon 1973, not least because the attendance included all the Roman Catholic Bishops, gave the impression that it saw itself as a high-powered body to conduct discussions at high level on highly-important topics of theological interest both theoretical and practical. If the Joint Working Group model had been followed, it would therefore have had to be reconstructed to include many more senior church people and more from the South of Ireland than were appointed in May 1970. It could still be responsible to, it could still report to, the various appointing bodies and would thus be clearly seen to be their instrument and not a separate institution.¹¹⁸ In this it would have been unlike, and an improvement on, the JWGs of the World Council of Churches and of the British Council of Churches.¹¹⁹

This did not happen. What actually happened was the establishment of an additional ecumenical instrument. A two-tiered or multi-tiered

ecumenical instrument can be very helpful (as recent British experience shows) but the work of the existing joint Group and of Ballymascanlon were for many years to remain uncoordinated. The former lacked ready access to power: in principle it related to the individual Protestant Churches only indirectly through ICC; its relationship to the Hierarchy was also indirect because its membership included no Catholic Bishop. The Joint Group however had a definite focus and did some excellent work, notably its working party on 'Violence in Ireland'. By contrast, the latter, Ballymascanlon, despite its powerful membership had no definite focus or precise purpose. The issue of structures for communication if not cooperation which was specifically mentioned in the February 1972 letter of ICC's Organizing Secretary would not be addressed for many more years.

But Ballymascanlon did survive. Another historic event of the year 1973 was the signing of the Sunningdale Agreement¹²⁰ This may indeed have been, in the words of Longman's *Chronicle of the 20th Century*, 'a dramatic moment in the history of Ireland'¹²¹ but at the time it proved to be a bridge too far. Like the Decree of Union of the Council of Florence in the fifteenth century between Rome and Constantinople it failed to be received, to be implemented. By contrast, Ballymascanlon 1973, however historic, was hardly dramatic - it produced no other agreement except to meet again - but it has managed to survive. Not for the first time the critics, the realists, the pessimists, the sceptics, have been confounded. Pressures from without of a secular and political nature and pressures from within of a religious and Christian nature both made their contribution to this survival. Of its nature Christian hope 'rejects the lore/ Of nicely - calculated less or more'.

But Ballymascanlon has more than survived. It has become the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) and is about to find a new future as a more mature ecumenical instrument forged and refined in the fires of the Troubles. It remains to pay tribute to those who were the architects of IICM and above all to the Methodist Minister, Eric Gallagher, who in his term as Chairman of ICC (1967-1969) pioneered the official moves which led to Ballymascanlon. Nothing indeed has happened of any significance for the cause of reconciliation in post-World War II and post-Vatican II Ireland without the active encouragement if not the actual participation of Eric Gallagher.

APPENDIX

Information is not readily available as yet about all the significant initiatives of this period. One of the revolutionary effects of the Second Vatican Council was cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and the United Bible Societies and on Whit Sunday 1968 they jointly published a document entitled *Guiding Principles for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible*. This led in 1974 under the auspices of 'Ballymascanlon' to a joint venture here in Ireland in which Catholics and Protestants cooperated in the distribution of St Luke's Gospel to every household. (Cf Cahal Daly and Stanley Worrall, Ballymascanlon, Belfast-Dublin 1978, p32.) Already in 1968 the Catholic Biblical Association, which held its first meeting in 1966, had changed its name to 'Irish Biblical Association' and admitted Protestants no longer as associate but as full members. (Cf Ian Ellis, *op. cit.*, p120.) Cooperation in Bible work led in 1989 to the formation of the National Bible Society of Ireland as an official, inter-denominational body in the Republic. Nothing could be more significant ecumenically, perhaps especially in Ireland, than joint Bible work. To my disappointment, however, I find that the relevant research and writing has not yet been undertaken. *The Story of the Hibernian Bible Society 1806-1956* is available in print and Asenath Nicholson's account of her visits to Ireland in 1844 and 1845 entitled *The Bible in Ireland* (Hodder and Stoughton, no date) makes fascinating reading but nothing is readily available on developments in Ireland in the post-World War II, post-Vatican Council II years. Some account of the work of Walter Abbott, SJ who was appointed after Vatican II to develop contacts with the United Bible Societies is available in my article 'Jesuits and Protestants Today', *Studies*, Summer 1992, pp 205-208, (*The New Millennium and the Unity of Christians* [Dublin 1998] chapter 12) and in Edwin H Robertson, *Taking the Word to the World*, Nashville, 1996, pp 103-122.

I had also thought that joint work for temperance might have been a good example of early cooperation between Catholics and Protestants but found no evidence to support this. Although Cardinal Logue did in 1915 join the other three Church Leaders in signing a letter to the Prime Minister on the subject of temperance (Ian Ellis *op. cit.*, pp 1213) and although the Irish Association for the Promotion of Temperance (IAPA) did regularly involve Roman Catholics as Committee members, the Pioneer Association did not reciprocate. So I gathered in conversation on 3 March 1998 with Dr Diarmuid Ferriter of the Modern History Department of University College, Dublin, the

results of whose research on 'The Pioneers and the Temperance Movement in Ireland in This Century' will shortly be published. The aims of the Pioneers were of course not only civic and secular as were those of the IAPA but also and primarily spiritual: to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart; this devotion however, although unknown to both parties, may have some Puritan associations: cf Gordon S. Wakefield, 'Sacred Heart', *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* ed. Gordon S Wakefield, pp London 1988, pp 347-348. Gallagher and Worrall (*op. cit.*, pp 135-136) also emphasize the cooperation in interchurch youth work which took place in the early 70s adding 'the year 1973 was the high-point of their relationships' but no details are ready to hand.

1 Some of the many individuals who helped me in preparing this chapter are named in the relevant notes. Among the others who helped I would single out for special mention the Rev Dr Norman Taggart, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland 1997-1998, Dr David Stevens, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and Joint Secretary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) and the staffs of the Irish School of Ecumenics Library, the Milltown Park Jesuit Library and the Representative Church Body Library of the Church of Ireland.

2 That this was a reason (but not the only reason of course) Professor Barkley more than once conveyed to me in conversation. In his published memoirs, (*Blackmouth and Dissenter*, Belfast 1991, p 135) he gives as the reason for declining the fact that 'I was then too deeply involved in the amalgamation of ACB [Assembly's College, Belfast] and MCD [Magee College, Derry]'. The obituary notice in the *Presbyterian Herald* February 1998, p30 omits all mention of Professor Barkley's contribution to the ecumenical movement: his Chairmanship of ICC is not mentioned, nor his membership of General Assembly's Inter-Church Relations Committee/Board.

3 *ibid.*, p164.

4 *Irish Catholic Directory 1974*, Dublin 1974, p663 where the date is mistakenly given as the 27th.

5 ICC Annual Report, *Journal of the General Synod 1974*, p209

6 'Some Notable Events in the Catholic Life of Ireland in 1973', *Irish Catholic Directory 1974*, Dublin 1974, p663.

7 *Ballymascanlon, An Irish Venture in Inter-Church Dialogue*, Belfast-Dublin 1978, p10.

8 'The Role of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland 1922- 1995', *Building Trust in Ireland*, Belfast 1996.

9 Report of the Committee appointed to Consider and Report upon the Subject of Reunion and Intercommunion', *The Six Lambeth Conferences 1867-1920*, London 1929, p422. The Secretary of the Committee was Bishop J. B. Crozier of

Down and Connor (sic). The Statement was repeated verbatim in the 1920, 1930 and 1948 Conferences. It is not quoted either by Bernard and Margaret Pawley in *Rome and Canterbury Through Four Centuries* (London 1974) or by Alan M G Stephenson in his *Anglicanism and the Lambeth Conferences* (London 1978). The Statement is remarkable granted the angry reaction of Lambeth 1888 to Vatican I and its Decree on Papal Primacy and Infallibility and granted Lambeth 1897's similar reaction to Leo XIII's negative decision about Anglican Orders the previous year. 'Under present conditions', Lambeth 1888 resolved and Lambeth 1897 repeated, 'it was useless to consider the question of Reunion with our brethren of the Roman Church'; cf Pawley *op.cit.*, pp233-234, Stephenson, *op.cit.*, p106.

10 Oliver Stratford Tomkins, 'The Roman Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Movement 1910-1948', *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, ed. Ruth Touse and Stephen Charles Neill, London 1954, pp 675 - 693.

11 *ibid.*, p683.

12 On the afternoon of 9 February 1998.

13 UCCC was established in 1923 and changed its name in 1966.

14 Ian Ellis, *Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations*, Belfast 1992, pp 129-132.

15 In lectures (of which tapes exist) to the students of the Certificate course of the Irish School of Ecumenics at Magee College, Derry.

16 *Irish Amsterdam*, p10.

17 *Irish Evanston*, p22. 18

Irish 18 Amsterdam, p12.

19 Robert H Gallagher, *My Web of Time*, Belfast 1959, p106. 20 So I gathered in conversation with Eric Gallagher himself. 21 *ibid.*

22 *Irish Amsterdam*, p7. 'Some of the Commission feel that common participation in the Lord's Supper would hasten unity. Others of us believe that such participation must be the culminating act and reward of unity rather than a means to that end.' *Irish Evanston*, p8.

23 *Op.cit.*, p93

24 Cf Appendix, pp 51-54.

25 Gallagher and Worrall, *Christians in Ulster 1968-1980*, p30. The positive contribution of Glenstal and Greenhills to Irish ecumenism is treated by Ian Ellis, *op.cit.*, p118.

26 Flannery being Fr Austin Flannery, OP to whom religious publishing in the

- English-speaking world in post-Vatican II times owes so much; he is, among other things, the editor of *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. The account which follows is based on a conversation on 16 April 1998 with Fr Flannery and on the valuable record put together by Joan Turner, *Glenstal Abbey Ecumenical Conferences 1964 -1983* (Belfast 1983).
- 27 His name appears as Dundass in Gallagher and Worrall, p29 and this mistake is repeated in Robin Boyd's *Ireland: Christianity Discredited or Pilgrim's Progress?* Geneva 1988.
- 28 So I gathered from Archdeacon Jenkins and Archbishop Armstrong, Cf 'George Simms: Ecumenical Exemplar', *The New Millennium and the Unity O f Christians*, c.5, footnote S.
- 29 Michael Hurley (ed). *Church and Eucharist*, Dublin 1966, pp 12 -13. A second volume of the proceedings which I edited in 1968 was entitled *Ecumenical Studies: Baptism and Marriage*. It was dedicated to the memory of Dom Joseph Dowdall whose untimely death had taken place in 1966 and included warm tributes to him from individual members of the participating Churches. On the question of the relative value of bilateral or multilateral conversations cf Lukas Vischer, 'The Activities of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches', *The Ecumenical Review* 1970, pp 36 - 69; Peter Hocken, 'Bilateral or Multilateral?', *One in Christ*, 6/4 (1970), pp 496 - 524. In *Irish Anglicanism* (Dublin 1970, pp 215 - 216) I saw Glenstal and Greenhills as paving the way also for the Tripartite Conversations between the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterians and the Methodists which started in 1968. This however was to ignore the fact and influence of the Murlough House Conferences which involved ten clerical members from each of the three Churches and took place from 1958 to 1962. Cf Carlisle Patterson, *Over The Hill*, Belfast 1997, pp 11 - 12.
- 30 Ray Dave y, *A Channel of Peace - The Story o f the Corrymeela Community*, London 1993, p32.
- 31 In a letter of 25 February 1998.
- 32 From the Rev PJC Breakey, then Presbyterian minister in Kells, Co Meath. He died when minister in Armagh in September 1982.
- 33 *The Relation o f the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to the Church o f Rome. A Report to General Assembly*, 1970, 9 -10.
- 34 Cf Michael Hurley 'The Irish School o f Ecumenics: How It Began', *One in Christ*, 33/4 (1997), pp 298 -316; *The New Millennium and the Unity of Christians*, Dublin 1998, c. 16.
- 35 Michael Hurley (ed). *Beyond Tolerance: The Challenge o f Mixed Marriage*, London 1975.
- 36 Daly and Worrall, *Ballymascanlon*, Belfast - Dublin 1978, pp 69 -79.
- 37 Peter Hocken, 'Charismatic Movement', *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva 1991, pp145-149; Christopher O'Donnell, O Carm, 'Charismatic Renewal', *Ecclesia*, Colledgeville 1996, pp 91-92; Philip F O'Mara, 'Ecumenism in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 17/1 (Winter 1980), pp 647-657.

- 38 *Ecumenism in Ireland. Survey papers commissioned for the Inter-Church Meeting at Ballymascanlon, Co. Louth, on 6 March 1980*, A Joint publication of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Irish Council of Churches, nd, pp 19, 26.
- 39 *Ibid.*, pp19.
- 40 Peter Hocken, *op.cit.*, p147. 'Catholics', according to the author, 'more than other charismatic-movement Christians interpreted their pentecostal experience in ecumenical terms'. He notes the fear and distrust which obtained of Protestant charismatics and Pentecostals and the resultant imposition of 'tighter organisation' by some Catholic hierarchies. The 1982 National Conference in Ireland as reported in *New Creation* quotes Cecil Kerr as remarking that 'prior to 1978 the conferences were inter-denominational'.
- 41 Peter Hocken, 'Charismatic Renewal, The Churches and Unity', *One in Christ*, 15/4 (1979), p310.
- 42 *loc.cit.*, p19.
- 43 *ibid.*, p26.
- 44 Cecil Kerr, *The Way of Peace*, Hodder & Stoughton 1990, p51.
- 45 *ibid.*, pp 53,60.
- 46 Thomas Flynn, *The Charismatic Renewal and the Irish Experience*, Hodder & Stoughton 1974, pp 33-50.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p59.
- 48 *Op.cit.*, p118. Church Union and Church Union 'negotiations' are of course the real test and certainly call for official contacts but in the earlier stages of the ecumenical journey interchurch activity will be both unofficial and official and the official as such will not necessarily be more effective. 'Official' can suggest being subject to, dependent on Church authority. For a Roman Catholic at least, events and institutions can be approved simply by Church authority and thus be authentic without being subject to and dependent on Church authority, without being official in that sense.
- 49 Dublin 1963, pp239-240.
- 50 The individuals in question were Bishop William J Philbin, Rev Frederick E Hill, the Right Rev W. Montgomery and Archbishop George Simms.
- 51 Belfast 1983 p11 where it is referred to as 'an Irish Faith Order Conference... in preparation for the first British Faith and Order Conference held in Nottingham in 1964'.
- 52 On p98. *The Church o f Ireland Journal o f General Synod 1964* (pp 145 - 147) refers to it as 'the one outstanding [ecumenical] event in the past year'. The UUCC's Annual Report for 1964 refers to it as 'the principal work of the Council' adding that 'its findings have been widely circulated', *ibid.*, p152.
- 53 *Over the Hill, Ecumenism in the Irish Presbyterian Church*, Belfast 1997.
- 54 The first example of official Catholic-Protestant cooperation was the Churches'

- Industrial Council. This began in 1958 and was related to the UCCC but as an official Catholic-Protestant agency it began the following year, in 1959, and from the Roman Catholic point of view it at least it was a local initiative, confined to the Diocese of Down and Connor whose bishop then was the Most Rev Dr Mageean and to whom in particular an approach had been made. Cf Michael Hurley, 'The Churches' Industrial Council', *The Furrow*, 16/10 (October 1965), pp 625-628; cf Gallagher and Worrall, *passim*. According to Robin Boyd (*Ireland, Christianity Discredited or Pilgrim's Progress?*, p44, note 4) quoting Sydney Bailey, the Churches' Industrial Council was founded in 1956.
- 55 Ian Ellis, *op.cit.*, p129, note 14. The phrase 'any other Christian Church' is broad enough to include the Roman Catholic Church.
- 56 For what follows cf Carlisle Patterson, *op.cit.*, pp31-32; Michael Hurley, 'Presbyterians and Repentance', *The Furrow*, 16 (1965), pp493-5.
- 57 *op.cit.*, p36.
- 58 *Journal of General Synod 1974*, p209.
- 59 For both Church of Ireland and Roman Catholics it has always been and continues to be the Presbytery and Synod of Derry. In Unionist parlance the city is called Londonderry, in Nationalist parlance it is called Derry.
- 60 WCC in 1965, BCC in 1967.
- 61 Carlisle Patterson, *op.cit.*, p35.
- 62 Bishop McAdoo did join the Commission but only after its first meeting (on 9 January 1967) and then went on to become Anglican Co-chairman of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission which succeeded the Prepatatory Commission. Cf Michael Hurley, 'An Ecumenical Exemplar: George Simms', *The New Millennium and the Unity of Christians*, chapter 5, note 6. A letter to me of 28 December 1966 from Canon Purdy in the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity states: 'You might perhaps like to know (though we have no authority to publish the information) that an Irishman, Bishop McAdoo, was an original choice for the Anglican delegation, but the Church of Ireland 'regretfully' withdrew him, because (I quote from an official letter) "(it has been under bitter attack recently from the extreme Protestant organisations in Northern Ireland because of its firm stand against the Paisley misrepresentation.
- In addition the publicity given to the forthcoming marriage of the of the Bishop of Portsmouth's daughter has unfortunately produced strong reaction in Ireland.'" The signatory of this 'official' Church of Ireland letter is not given. The Church of Ireland came under further 'bitter attack' in January 1967 because of its invitation to the Church of England Bishop, Anglican Observer at Vatican II, Dr John Moorman to speak in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast and felt obliged to withdraw the invitation; cf Gallagher and Worrall, *op.cit.*, p36.
- 63 Letters of 26 and 29 June 1968 in my personal papers
- 64 Patrick Jenkins 'The Practice of Ecumenism', *Hibernia*, 33/3 (Jan 31-Feb 13 1969), p6.
- 65 *A Precarious Belonging: Presbyterians and the Conflict in Ireland*, Belfast 1995,

- p56. Addressing General Assembly in June 1998 he again referred to 'the hopefilled years between 1965 and 1968': *The Irish Times*, 4 June 1998.
- 66 Michael Hurley, 'How the Irish School of Ecumenics Began', *One in Christ*, 33/4 (Winter 1997), p300. In was in March of this year that, owing to an intervention by Archbishop McQuaid, a public lecture I was due to give at Milltown Park on Original Sin was cancelled, cf 'An Ecumenical Lecture Series: The Milltown Park Public Lectures 1960 - 1969', *The New Millennium and the Unity of Christians*, c14.
- 67 Thanks to the help of Eric Gallagher.
- 68 Gallagher and Worrall, *op.cit.*, p38. 69 *Ibid.*, p130.
- 70 ICC Annual Report, 1968, *Journal of General Synod 1968*, p 160. ICC's Fiftieth Annual Report, May 1972, p18 states: 'In his part-time work for the Council [ICC] he [Rev Norman Taggart] has given himself with unsparing devotion and to great effect as organiser, negotiator, publicist and correspondent, The Council owes a profound debt of gratitude to Mr Taggart for the immense volume of work accomplished by him on its behalf.' In 1970 ICC agreed that the appointment of a full-time Executive Secretary was desirable. The Rev Ralph Baxter was appointed to the post in July 1972. (John M Barkley, *op.cit.*, pp 13-14).
- 71 Gallagher and Worrall, *op.cit.*, p37. Eric Gallagher was also ICC President from 1967 to 1969.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p133.
- 73 Minutes of ICC Executive 30 Jan 1969. But an informal meeting of the four had taken place in the Spring of 1968 at the official opening of the new Armagh Planetarium, Gallagher and Worrall, *op.cit.*, p38.
- 74 Quoting from a copy in a file of private papers covering this period which Dr Norman Taggart very kindly made available to me. In 1969 the Methodist President, Eric Gallagher, was also ICC Chairman. Gallagher and Worrall, *op.cit.*, pp 131-132 attach far more importance than I would feel able to grant to the appearance in 1969 to the *Irish Directory on Ecumenism*.
- 75 Gallagher and Worrall, *op.cit.*, p130.
- 76 ICC Annual Report, May 1971, p8.
- 77 ICC Annual Report, 1970, *Journal of General Synod 1970*, pp 151-2.
- 78 So Bishop Michael Smith, Secretary of the Hierarchy, adds in a letter of 28 May 1998 informing me of the absence of references to the joint Group in the Minutes of the 1970 Meetings of the Conference.
- 79 ICC Annual Report, May 1971, pp7-8.
- 80 ICC Annual Report, May 1972, p5.
- 81 *Ibid.*

- 82 *Violence in Ireland: A Report to the Churches*, Belfast-Dublin 1976. At its May 1969 meeting the Executive Committee of the ICC had recommended that such a Working Party be set up by ICC. The date of its establishment, 1973, is given in Daly and Worrall, *op.cit.*, p59. As noted by Gallagher and Worrall, *op.cit.*, p135, the special approval of the Hierarchy was required.
- 83 Bew and Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968 -1993*, pp 36-37.
- 84 ICC Annual Report, 1972, *Journal of General Synod 1972*, p171. For the 1969 statement of ICC Annual Report, 1970, *Journal of General Synod 1970*, p153. In a conversation on 18 March 1998 Eric Gallagher agreed that on the whole BCC was less helpful and challenging than it ought to have been, not only out of ignorance but also out of a reluctance to intervene which was probably not unrelated to the Westminster convention of non-interference in Northern Ireland affairs.
- 85 ICC Annual Report, 1972, p2.
- 86 Made in the Autumn of 1971; cf Church Unity Committee Report, *Journal of General Synod 1973*, p184. In a letter of 5 February 1998 Bishop Poyntz, who was then active in the ecumenical movement (as, for example, a Church of Ireland Unity Committee and one of its appointees to ICC), writes: 'Rightly it is stated that Cardinal Conway issued an invitation through the ICC to its member Churches to join in conversations. It is sometimes forgotten that the Church of Ireland through Archbishop McCann wrote to the Cardinal suggesting conversations. If memory serves me right this was not answered save through a holding letter and subsequently the Cardinal made his dramatic move.'
- 87 Church Unity Committee Report, *Journal of General Synod 1973*, p184. No copy of this letter is extant in the ICC archives or in Dr Taggart's private papers. The original is not, so I am informed by the archivist, on file in the archives of the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh. An extract, not the letter itself, is on file in the archives of the Secretary to the Irish Episcopal Conference, the Bishop of Meath who has very kindly sent me a copy.
- The first is to discuss the possibility of setting up in Ireland a working party to consider pastoral and other factors involved in interchurch marriages. You will be aware that a lot of important work has been done on this in other places, the nearest to us being the work by the joint Group of the British Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in England, Wales and Scotland. This matter was brought to the ICC Executive as a result of an initiative from the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church, ie by departments in those churches, and I have since been in touch with the other member Churches, and have received support on all sides for an approach to you to explore the possibility. Another matter that I have been asked to discuss with you is how the ICC can relate to the various structures for ecumenism in the Roman Catholic Church. Is more than corresponding contact possible between the ICC and such bodies as the Episcopal Commission on Ecumenism and its Advisory Committee, for example?

- 88 *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 21 April 1972.
- 89 *Irish Times*, 14 April 1972; *Church of Ireland Gazette* 21 April 1972, reporting Spring meeting of ICC.
- 90 18th April 1972. According to the *Irish Press* report (14 April 1972) of the Spring meeting, the question of including the Roman Catholic Church in ICC had come up in discussion. In an article on 'The Irish Council of Churches' Dr Taggart emphasised the need for 'consultation, confrontation and co-operation' [with the Roman Catholic Church]...'honest and informed confrontation on the significant points of difference in faith and practice which undoubtedly still divide.. the honest examination of fears and differences...'. *New Divinity*, 3/1 (Summer 1972), pp 109-110.
- 91 *The Irish Council of Churches 1923 - 1983* pp 26-27.
- 92 *Journal of General Synod 1974*, p209. 93
- Quoting from copy supplied by ICC. 94
- Quoting from Minutes in ICC archives.
- 95 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting October 1972 in ICC archives.
- 96 The following excerpts have been very kindly given to me by the present Secretary of the Conference, the Most Rev Michael Smith DD,DCL.
- 97 Letter of 28 May 1998.
- 98 In a conversation on 1 June 1998. The Episcopal Commission on Ecumenism was then composed of the Bishops of Cloyne, Kildare and Leighlin, Waterford and Lismore and Ardagh and Clonmacnoise; the latter, Dr Cahal Daly, was Secretary of the Commission. It could well be that the Commission in its Report had accepted 'the proposal of a joint Working Party'; that would make the 'postponement' rather than rejection of the proposal more understandable.
- 99 He expressed this view in conversation more than once and notably in an interview which he gave to Mr T P O'Mahony and which was published in *The Sunday Press*, 7 March 1976. Mr O'Mahony has confirmed this in a recent conversation (25 May 1998) and kindly sent me a copy of the article. On the death of Cardinal Conway on 17 April 1977 Archbishop Ryan took over as CoChairman of Ballymascanlon but did not hand the chair to the Archbishop of Armagh when Professor O Fiaich was appointed later that same year. Archbishop O Fiaich felt this all the more because Ballymascanlon was in his own diocese and he shared his feelings on the matter with Eric Gallagher (so Eric Gallagher in conversation on 18 March 1998). The Dermot Ryan papers (I am informed by the Archdiocesan archivist) are not yet accessible.
- 100 ICC Annual Report, May 1974 p5. Quoted by Daly and Worrall in *Ballymascanlon*, p59.
- 101 As reported by *The Irish Times* (14 April 1972) and *Church of Ireland Gazette* (21 April 1972). I quote his ICC Anniversary address from a copy received from Dr Taggart: 'I shared in the vision and uncertainties of those days, believing that what we were attempting was important for the Churches and the wider

- community. I must also admit to a growing doubt over that period. Were ecumenical instruments, including the ICC, genuine instruments of change? Or were they, in the hands of some church administrators, instruments to control change at a pace acceptable only to conservatives?'
- 102 It did not acquire premises of its own until 1977 courtesy of the Rhineland and Westphalia Churches.
- 103 In 1973 three were at work and three more were being considered (ICC Annual Report 1973, *Journal of General Synod 1973*, pp 219 - 220). In 1979 four had been set up, one had been agreed but not yet set up and three more had been proposed but not yet agreed. (ICC Annual Report 1979, *Journal of General Synod 1979*, pp 106 - 107).
- 104 Its Executive Secretary, Mr Jerome Connolly, appointed in May 1970, became a member of the Violence in Ireland Working Party. From the beginning the Commission included some individual Protestants as members and from 1978 it cooperated with the ICC in a Peace Education Programme. So I gathered in conversation with Mr Connolly on 5 June 1998.
- 105 As a member of the Advisory Committee I had submitted a memorandum on a re-structuring of the Committee which included the appointment of a full-time secretary. This had been discussed on 19 June 1972 and gone forward to the Hierarchy but, according to the Minutes, 'as from Fr Hurley' (ie not as from the Committee) and without success.
- 106 Minutes of ICC Executive Committee meeting in October 1973. 107 p59.
- 108 ICC Annual Report, 1979, *Journal of General Synod 1979*, pp 180 - 181; ICC Annual Report 1980, *Journal of General Synod 1980*, p205.
- 109 He is listed as a new member in the Secretariat's Information Service n.22, October/IV, p34.
- 110 ICC Annual Report, 1972, p8. Where this article appeared is not indicated.
- 111 Michael Hurley. 'Christian Unity by the Year 2000? Part I, *Doctrine and Life*, 48/1 (January 1998), p28.
- 112 *Today* was published by Christian Journals and was therefore the brainchild of Rev Wilbert Forker, the Irish Methodist Minister who had worked with the WCC in Geneva. Its editors were Rev Robert Brown of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, lecturer in Stranmillis Training College, Belfast and Rev Christopher O'Donnell, O Carm of the Roman Catholic Church, Lecturer in the Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Dublin. The latter informs me that the editorial committee also included the Rev Dr Robin Eames, later to become Bishop of Derry and Church of Ireland Primate. The Periodical which was a quarterly lapsed after a few years; it is not catalogued in the National Library, Dublin. Cecil Mc Garry's article is entitled 'Catholics on Irish Council?'; that of Norman Taggart 'A Fight on our Hands'. There is no pagination.

- 113 'A Fight on our Hands', *Today*, March 1973
- 114 Peter Hocken, 'Bilateral or Multilateral?', *One in Christ*, 6/4 (1970), p510. At that time according to the author JWG's between the Roman Catholic Church and National Councils existed in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA, *ibid.*, p501.
- 115 Unreasonably of course because such discussions and negotiations can be envisaged only on a bilateral basis.
- 116 Cf above p41.
- 117 *Ibid.*
- 118 Daly and Worrall (*Ballymascanlon*, p57) insist that 'at the Ballymascanlon meetings the several Churches in membership of the Irish Council of Churches participate directly, on the authority of their respective governing bodies, the Council being only concerned to facilitate the practical arrangements'.
- 119 When writing the Introduction for *Church and Eucharist* (p22) in 1966 I had envisaged the possibility of a 'joint working party' being formed in the future by the UCCC and the Roman Catholic Church.
- 120 Involving a powersharing executive between Unionists and Nationalists and a Council of Ireland; a strike by the Ulster Workers' Council led in May 1974 to the resignation of Mr Brian Faulkner, Chief Executive Minister and of the Unionist members of the Executive and thus to the collapse of the whole venture.
- 121 n1073.

THE PERIOD SINCE 1973

Rev Dr Ian Ellis

The first of the 'Ballymascanlon Talks' was held twenty-five years ago, on 26th September, 1973 at the Ballymascanlon Hotel just outside Dundalk. The venue was chosen with a view to facilitating the NorthSouth nature of the gathering. There were eighty-three representatives of the member Churches of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and of the Irish Episcopal Conference, the four sessions being co-chaired by the Roman Catholic and Anglican Archbishops of Armagh/1. Cahal Daly and Stanley Worrall have written of the sense of anticipation that preceded this first Ballymascanlon:

It was not without excitement and a sense of a momentous new departure that the delegates of all the member Churches of the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Hierarchy convened on Ballymascanlon on 26th September, 1973. It was also with a certain anxiety as to whether we had been too ambitious, whether the meeting might fail to achieve the atmosphere conducive to ecumenical harmony².

Any such anxieties were to prove needless, however, as the meeting was characterized by both frankness and charity. Afterwards, there was a general satisfaction that it had indeed been a successful encounter. Prayer itself had been a vital element, giving the meeting a clearly spiritual quality and thereby assisting the success of the gathering.

A survey of how the Meeting has developed over the years is a testimony to the fact that there has been ecumenical 'movement' in the official relations between the Irish Churches, albeit at a very gradual pace.

There are basically two main periods within this quarter century, and with the current review of the IICM and the ICC well underway it is to be hoped that we are about to enter a wholly new period which will be the fruit of all that has gone before.

The two periods in the life of 'Ballymascanlon' since 1973 run, first, from that year until 1984, and from 1984 until the present. When one looks at the content of these meetings, it is clear that a major change of emphasis took place in the mid-1980s. Until then the representatives of the Churches were preoccupied with what one can only describe as an exercise in predominantly comparative theology, together with some discussion of community issues.

From the time of the reorganisation of the Talks in 1984, sessions were

held more or less regularly on an 18-month basis and the main items of discussion were no longer the classical theological issues but the reports emanating from the Department of Social Issues of the IICM and, more recently, from the Department of Theological Questions.

The Press naturally interpreted the move to hold the first Ballymascanlon as fundamentally and first of all a response to the Troubles. The media were inclined to view it as a kind of unofficial peace process. The Churches, however, viewed it in a wholly different way. It was first of all an exercise in ecumenism. It was, moreover, not an easy or particularly comfortable experience. Those who think such meetings are cosy, ecclesiastical get-togethers do not appreciate how painful it can be to discuss issues that go to the heart of all one believes with people who at times differ quite fundamentally. There were certain things that could be discussed easily, there were certain things that could be discussed with difficulty, and there were even certain things that could not be discussed at all. The Troubles themselves were more or less off the agenda, although the topic of 'community problems' was one way into the subject. The working party report, *Violence in Ireland (1976)* - under joint Group on Social Problems auspices - was a project that was only agreed to by special permission from the Churches themselves. The topic of sectarianism was first proposed in 1976, but the project did not start until 1990 with a report being published in 1993. Even then it was published as a 'discussion document', and not as a report.

In order to plan the first IICM, a Steering Committee was established. This Steering Committee then planned subsequent meetings and arranged the setting up of working parties. There were attempts, particularly on the ICC side, to create a Liaison Committee with broader terms of reference than merely organizing meetings, but these efforts did not bear fruit. It was not until 1984 and the paper prepared by Fr Micheal Ledwith (now Mgr) and Dr David Poole, that a serious reorganization got underway. However, in response to the need for some formal method of discussing the particularly sensitive area of interchurch marriages (then more generally referred to as 'mixed marriages'), the Joint Standing Committee for Mixed Marriages was established in 1975 and was independent of the Ballymascanlon structure.

I. THE 1973 TALKS

CHURCH, SCRIPTURE AND AUTHORITY

Archbishop Dermot Ryan and Dean Salmon presented introductory papers on the topic 'Church, Scripture and Authority'.³ Archbishop

Ryan began by affirming that all the Churches shared the Scriptures, but immediately highlighted the fact that the Churches view Scripture in differing ways, as indeed they view the relationship between Scripture and the Church in differing ways. He spoke about the early development of a structured authority in the Church and remarked on how the Church came before Scripture. He spoke about the infallibility of the Pope, of the College of Bishops and of the Magisterium, which he said under certain circumstances was equal to the authority of Scripture itself. His paper was a classical statement emphasizing the central importance of Scripture in the life of the Church. He could speak of Scripture as 'the abiding norm against which all developments in the life and teaching of the Church have to be tested', but he also affirmed the infallible teaching and interpretative authority of the Pope and the Bishops. Archbishop Ryan's paper could not have been described as adventurous; rather, it was a correct statement of Roman Catholic teaching, with ample references to the decrees of the Second Vatican Council in particular. However, any other approach could not really have been expected in this very formal meeting of Church leaders. Fundamental disagreement became clear on the subjects of papal authority and infallibility.

Dean Salmon, in his reply, indicated a large area of agreement with Archbishop Ryan on Scripture, Church and Ministry, but declared that 'the main difference lies in the doctrine of infallibility, which creates the most grave difficulties for Anglicans'.

A working party on this topic - Church, Scripture and Authority - was set up, jointly chaired by Archbishop Ryan and Principal JLM Haire, but the work was extended also to include the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, the Tripartite Conversations as well as the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

Papers also were read on 'Social and Community Problems' by the Rev Dr Eric Gallagher and Bishop Eamonn Casey.⁴ Dr Gallagher noted that the joint Group on Social Problems was already tackling a range of issues, but added that our 'common humanity' meant that we have 'a world of things to face together'. The Ballymascanlon Meeting - unlike the joint Group - proceeded to address particularly controversial issues, but Dr Gallagher pleaded that the reports of the joint Group's

working parties should be taken seriously, foreseeing the danger that much of this work could simply be shelved.

Dr Gallagher proceeded to focus on civil rights and violence. He said that the proper concern should be 'whether the people of Ireland - in one state or two - have the basic attributes of life: the right to live, the right to work, to worship or not to worship according to their conscience, the right to peaceful assembly and the right to strive constitutionally for constitutional change, if they want to.' As far as violence was concerned, Dr Gallagher felt that Ireland had suffered far too much from 'an emotional and extravagant adulation of its gunmen' and saw the Churches as not having done all they could to discourage this; there had been ambivalence.

In his paper, Dr Gallagher went on to refer to practical matters which can give hurt to feelings and conscience on either side, first of all considering the thorny issue of interchurch marriages. He said: 'I must, in honesty, state that Protestants, and especially those who view today's meeting with misgivings, would consider me to have failed in my duty if I were not to ask that objectively and in charity we should commence a continuing study of this whole problem.' He also, prophetically, suggested the need for a joint pastoral approach to interchurch marriages.

Turning to education, he felt that segregation was not 'at the root' of division, but said it would be 'naive' to claim that 'ignorance and fear of each other have no connection with separation in early years'; he felt that the Churches needed to look objectively at what they were doing. He asked: 'Is our destiny never to know each other fully? Never to have for each other that respect which comes from knowledge and understanding?'

On the subject of 'the modern family', Dr Gallagher said some citizens in the Republic were second class citizens because they were denied the freedom to arrange their family life or escape from a marriage 'which has lost all meaning'. He felt it was a question of how far the Church had a right to influence legislation in matters of this kind. In his reply, however, Bishop Eamonn Casey said that if 95% of a community were adherents of the same Church some laws and measures which critics said were due to 'unfair and unwarranted pressures by Church authority' could simply be attributed to a common 'religious instinct' expressing itself. On the topic of the reconciliation of majority and minority rights, Bishop Casey called for 'constant and continuous discussion and dialogue' between all parties concerned. Bishop Casey, in a general introduction to his comments on the topic

of Church and Community Problems, said that the Church should be the 'perceptive antennae' of society, creating an awareness and sensitivity to problems in the community, the 'responsible sensitiser' of society's conscience, and an 'effective catalyst' for change. Referring to education in particular, Bishop Casey said there were two issues primarily at stake: the preservation of religion as an integral part of education, and the protection of the rights of parents to have their children educated in their own beliefs and values.

Turning to the topic of interchurch marriages, Bishop Casey referred to Bishop Cahal Daly's response, which was to follow, but indicated his acceptance of Dr Gallagher's recommendation 'that a commission on mixed marriages... be established forthwith'. He saw the resolution of these problems as lying within the wider context of 'inter-confessional dialogue'.

Bishop Daly (later Cardinal), in his paper outlining the Irish Episcopal Conference's position regarding interchurch marriages, noted the advances in the 1970 *Motu Proprio*, notably the dropping of the requirement for a promise from the Protestant party, something to which the Church of Ireland bishops had objected in their Pastoral Letter of November, 1966. He indicated his view that there was a variety of reasons for the decline in the Protestant population in the Republic, and felt that 'undue concentration on the mixed marriages factor alone could prevent investigation of remedies for other factors'. Bishop Daly also defended the Irish Hierarchy's interpretation of the *Motu Proprio*: 'Comparison of the *post-motu proprio* statements and pastoral practice in Ireland with those obtaining in England and Wales, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, indeed the English-speaking world as a whole, reveals no significant difference whatever'. For Bishop Daly, interchurch marriages were not a 'shortcut to Christian unity', but the pain of Christian disunity at the heart of a family could serve to intensify the desire for unity; the problem was however, ultimately, an issue of ecclesiology.

BAPTISM, EUCHARIST, MARRIAGE

Professor John Barkley presented a paper on 'Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage', with Bishop William Philbin replying.⁶

In opening his paper, Professor Barkley referred to the unofficial ecumenical conferences that had already been held at Glenstal and Greenhills, describing these as laying the foundations which had helped to make the first official meeting of Church representatives in

Ireland possible. He recalled how four of the topics discussed at the Glenstal and Greenhills conferences, remarkably, had been the Church, Baptism, the Eucharist and Christian Marriage, and he spoke of how those conferences had shown that although there were points of agreement and disagreement between the Churches, it was everyone's duty to treat one another as fellow-Christians. Indeed, Professor Barkley saw one important consequence of Vatican II as creating a situation in which all now could recognize one another as fellow-Christians. Protestants had always regarded the Roman Catholic Church as 'part of the Church of Christ'; now, Professor Barkley said with reference to Eduard Schillebeeckx's *Vatican II: The Real Achievement*, it was of vital importance to ecumenism that the Roman Catholic Church no longer regarded other Christian communities as 'sects' or 'heretical communities', but as 'Churches' or 'ecclesial communities'.

Referring first to the sacrament of Baptism, Professor Barkley said that if, as the Churches agreed, all are united to Christ in baptism, this must lead 'to the ending of all human estrangements in both Church and society based on differences of denomination, race or class'. Professor Barkley, with characteristic prophetic insight, highlighted certain challenges in this for the Irish Churches, including the mutual recognition of baptism and its consequences, and the implications of one baptism for eucharistic sharing.

Moving on to the subject of the Eucharist, Professor Barkley introduced his comments by referring to three ways in which the Roman Catholic Church had brought about a closer harmony in its practices with the Churches of the Reformation: the use of the vernacular, the revival of the Liturgy of the Word, and - following the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in 1963 - the communion of the laity, in certain circumstances, in both kinds. While affirming that 'all hold that the Eucharist is the central act of Christian worship and that Christ is present at, and in the sacramental mystery', Professor Barkley was of the opinion that there was a problem of interpretation and articulation of sacramental theology. He said that 'the connotation of terms like 'propitiation', 'sacrifice', 'grace', etc., require as careful scrutiny today as in the sixteenth century'.⁷

Professor Barkley's approach displayed a clear theological analysis. Quoting FJ van Beeck, he argued first that there should never be too much of a contrast between prayer and Bible study on the one hand, and eucharistic fellowship on the other. Van Beeck had written: 'Prayer and Bible services are all too often permitted 'because nothing happens

in them', as if prayer and the Word were not sacramental.'⁸ Barkley went on to claim that Christians' failure to live and act as the one visible body of Christ is 'a contradiction of the baptismal gift we all claim to possess.'

Referring to the view that eucharistic sharing should follow only from doctrinal agreement, Professor Barkley said that 'complete agreement' was both 'impossible and undesirable'. The question begged itself as to what degree of agreement was necessary. He also suggested, provocatively, that the denial of intercommunion could in fact be 'a denial of recognition of any genuinely ecclesial element in the other Church', a suggestion perhaps calculated to lead to a concentrating of minds.

The third and final part of Professor Barkley's brief was to consider the topic of Christian Marriage. He commenced by affirming that, while Protestants and Roman Catholics differed on whether or not Marriage was a sacrament, it remained 'just as sacred for the Protestant Christian as for the Catholic'. However, he viewed the 1966 Instruction, *Matrimonii Sacramentum*, and the 1970 *Motu Proprio*, *Matrimonia Mixta*, as being no more than 'modifications'; there was no fundamental change to be discerned in these documents. Professor Barkley said:

...the crux of the matter remains. The validity of an inter-confessional marriage continues to depend upon the observance of the canonical form or dispensation therefrom, and it is the ordinary who decides. There is only a modification of ecclesiastical discipline, so from the Protestant standpoint let us hope that *Matrimonia Mixta* is an interim measure.

Professor Barkley, in taking this robustly frank approach, was indicating that there were matters that needed urgent attention. He highlighted for areas for discussion: (1) Marriage as a common social reality, (2) its sacramental reality, (3) ecclesiastical regulations, and (4) the extent to which ecclesiastical regulations could be divisive in a 'pluralist' society. There was clearly significant work to be done.

Solutions to the many problems relating to Baptism, Eucharist and Marriage needed to be found, and they had to be found 'together', Professor Barkley said, pleading for solutions that had practical consequences that could be honoured in every parish.

Bishop Philbin's response, after expressing a welcome for Professor Barkley's approach and accepting the 'regrettable necessity' to recognize fundamental differences and to be candid about them,

focused solely on the question of interchurch marriages. He took the view that the Roman Catholic Church, since New Testament times, had allowed the apostles and their successors the right to make binding rules on the Church. If laws were necessary in civil society, where 'reason and commonsense' alone might seem to be sufficient to establish order, how much more important were they in the Church, which is 'not entirely a matter of reason and commonsense' but which 'demands the submission of the intellect to things that greatly exceed its comprehension'. Bishop Philbin affirmed that the obligation on Roman Catholic parents to hand on their faith to their children was one of 'a whole range' of obligations concerning marriage. He said that the problem of interchurch marriages was, ultimately, an ecclesiological problem. There was the temptation to change rules to make matters easier, but this would be 'to reject divinely made provisions'. However, Bishop Philbin concluded by emphasizing that what he had said should not be taken as excluding discussion of the problems arising in an interchurch marriage situation, and he accepted that there should indeed be an examination of the issue with a view to bettering the situation.

CHRISTIANITY AND SECULARISM

Bishop Cahal Daly presented his paper on 'Christianity and Secularism', with Bishop Henry McAdoo (later Archbishop) replying.

Bishop Daly commenced by refereeing to the 'death of God' theology and strongly resisting any attempt to identify Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of 'religionless Christianity' with it. Daly affirmed:

The phrases 'religionless Christianity' and 'man come of age' have proved misleading but the thought of Bonhoeffer, underlying them, provides little to quarrel with. It must be remembered also that Bonhoeffer was a man for whom prayer, liturgy, the sacraments, exercises of piety, retreats, examination of conscience, all that is traditionally called 'religion', were central to his understanding and living of Christianity.

The lesson of Bonhoeffer - or one of the lessons - was that words about God 'must be backed by life'. So, the secular world needed not a God of the gaps, but a God 'at the centre'.⁹

Turning to moral values, Bishop Daly was firmly of the view that secular morality is, at least to some degree, 'secularisations of religious codes of ethics', for 'the very possibility of a completely coherent and consistent moral system, presupposes and depends on God'; changes

in general attitudes to a whole range of personal moral issues were due to the 'drastic decline in Christian belief'. Touching - necessarily all too briefly - on the topics of abortion and violence, Dr Daly said: 'To men for whom life is not sacred, God is not sacred either'. He concluded his paper with a resounding and forward-looking call to renewal in mission together, for the missionary task could only be hampered by the disunity of the Churches.

In his response, Bishop McAadoo spoke about the shift that had taken place in moral theology, a shift from a rather legalistic approach to the modern dynamic, Kingdom-orientated approach: 'Moral theology has become Christ-centred and its context is the living Church,' he said.¹⁰

Working parties were assembled to continue work in the areas covered by the papers presented to this first plenary.

II. BALLYMASCANLON 1974 AND 1975

At the Ballymascanlon Talks held on 1st May, 1974, interim reports from the working parties were received, and then on 23rd April 1975 they presented final reports - in full on Christianity and Secularism, and in part only in the three other areas: Church, Scripture and Authority; Social and Community Problems; and Baptism, Eucharist and Marriage.¹¹

The final report of the Church, Scripture and Authority working party included separate statements from the Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. Although this denominational approach was characteristic, straightforward agreed texts on Revelation and Scripture were included. As Daly and Worrall wrote:

It is when the Working Party turns to consideration of the role of the Church in relation to the Scriptures that differences begin to appear and the Party has recourse to comparison of views rather than to reconciliation of them.

Concerning the historic formularies of faith issuing from the Reformation period, the working party made a distinctively irenic statement:

In particular the severe language used of opponents and their views now seem to accord ill with Christian charity, while adding nothing to reasoned persuasion.¹²

In 1974, the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches had cooperated in distributing copies of St. Luke's Gospel to all households in Ireland, and in 1976-77 local ecumenical groups were to study St. John. The working party found it difficult to assess the value of the former, but commented appreciatively on the latter exercise. Local Bible study groups were set up in many places under the encouragement of the working party, which continued into the 1980s. The working party on Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage reported on Eucharist in 1975 and on Baptism in 1977; a joint Standing Committee on Mixed Marriages would shortly be formed, but at the 1975 Meeting interchurch marriages would be touched on only in the report of the working party on Social and Community Problems.

The statement on the Eucharist presented agreements and disagreements, noting how 'the different traditions give expression in different ways to the importance which we all agree the Eucharist must have in the life of the Church.'¹³ There was agreement on the concept of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but there were also differences as to the 'how' of this presence. Three areas of convergence were noted by the working party:

- (1) The common affirmation of the redemptive sufficiency of the sacrifice of the Cross;
- (2) The nature of the biblical 'memorial' emerging from the works of biblical scholars from different Churches; and (3) A broader and deeper concept of the sacrament which assists us to relate the Eucharist to the sacrifice of the Cross without derogating from the unrepeatable character and all-sufficiency of that sacrifice.¹⁴

The working party on Social and Community Problems presented its final report in 1975, dealing with only two topics: Internment and Mixed Marriages. So, while the Working Party on Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage did not deal with the last of these, marriage, the Working Party on Social and Community Problems did address the specifically interchurch marriage dimension.

On the subject of internment without trial - introduced by the British Government in Northern Ireland in 1971 - the working party noted the six reports on the issue published by the International Red Cross, the Parker and the Gardiner Reports. Members of the working party had also visited the Maze Prison and talked with detainees and staff. This whole area was recognized as highly emotive and within the working party there were differences, which were accepted 'in a spirit

of Christian brotherhood',¹⁵ but the report highlighted areas of agreement. It was felt that setting out differences would not serve any particular purpose in the context of the report. The members agreed that internment was a matter of 'grave concern, and indeed anguish' for the individuals concerned and their relatives and friends; the hardships facing internees' families were highlighted; there was dissatisfaction with the conditions in which internees were being held; and all were concerned about the duration of internees' detention without trial as with the duration of the policy of internment itself. It was, indeed, later in 1975 that internment was abandoned by the Government.

On interchurch marriages, the particular difficulties facing couples in a divided and unstable society were recognized, and it was affirmed that 'each party must respect the inviolability of the conscientious convictions of the other and seek to resolve conflicts with the fullest regard for Christian truth and love.'¹⁶ The working party stressed the importance of a sensitive and pastoral approach to the whole issue. The joint Standing Committee on Mixed Marriages was formed in 1975, producing its first report two years later. This Committee is still in existence and was formed at a time when there were particularly strong feelings on the subject, especially within the Church of Ireland. The situation since then, although still by no means ideal from a Protestant perspective, has changed for the better, somewhat taking the steam out of the debate. This has been due to a significant extent to improvements within the Roman Catholic Church's regulations as set forth in the Irish Episcopal Conference's 1983 *Directory*.

The working party on Christianity and Secularism produced a full and extensive final report to the Ballymascanlon Talks in 1975. It was not simply hostile to secularism, but tried to distinguish between the good and the bad in secular trends. This was a positive approach which, nonetheless, was based on the conviction that materialism leaves a great void in the interpretation of life; society, having turned away from theology, was filling this void with astrology, witchcraft and necromancy. However, the Church had to present itself more effectively as not being simply antagonistic to science and to 'all the consequences of secularism'. The working party affirmed that 'the Gospel and its moral implications must stand today by their intrinsic value and obvious truth rather than by the body that proclaims them'¹⁷ The report went on to consider various aspects of 'the Challenge of Secularism': family life, law, politics, economics, advertising, inflation, education, natural science, medicine and moral

judgments. The conclusion to the report set forth a series of 'practical suggestions', including a political item of current interest today:

In the political field the Churches could together encourage legislation to remove irritants which, while not preventing people from working peacefully for their political aspirations would remove what others regard as threats to their future and way of life. One example is the claim to jurisdiction over Northern Ireland in the Constitution of the Republic. Another is the rejection of the sharing of power and responsibility which would help to guarantee for the Roman Catholic minority of the North that it has a just future with equal opportunities for its young people and full protection under the law.¹⁸

III. BALLYMASCANLON 1977

The working parties set up at the first Ballymascanlon had produced their reports and at the 1977 meeting new topics were on the agenda. The first was in the area of ecclesiology, with papers presented by the Rev CWC Quin, who stressed the scriptural norm in Church life, and Archbishop Dermot Ryan. Quin, in his paper entitled 'The Church in the Gospels and St Paul', warned that while each Church can claim to possess the 'things necessary for Salvation' no Church, 'however richly endowed', can claim to possess the plenitude of 'the insearchable riches of Christ'.¹⁹

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Rev Dermot Ryan, presented a paper on 'The Unity of the Church in the New Testament'. He commenced by reminding the audience that there was, in the contemporary context, a risk of confusing the pursuit of ecumenism with the pursuit of peace in Northern Ireland. He affirmed that the Church is not merely a spiritual, but also a visible reality. It has an ordered life in which ecclesiastical office plays an essential role. Archbishop Ryan said that although there was diversity in the New Testament, nonetheless it conveyed an overwhelming impression of being one Church.²⁰ However, Archbishop Ryan was challenged at the meeting by the Rev Dr Jack Weir, who warned against an 'over-rigid' view of the Church, such as he saw in the Archbishop's paper.

The second Section was on the subject of Historical Breaches in Christendom, with papers by Mgr Patrick Corish and Professor John Barkley. Mgr Corish surveyed the early Christian centuries, the Reformation period and the origins of sectarianism in Ireland, aptly

commenting that 'those who will not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it'.²¹ Professor Barkley presented an extensive survey of the main historical breaches and concluded by posing sixteen questions which arose from his study and were relevant to the contemporary situation facing the Irish Churches.

The third Section was on The Theology of Christian Unity. Principal JLM Haire noted that there were mixed motives for the pursuit of unity; the 'better reasons' pointed to divine providence. Principal Haire outlined progress made during the present century and contrasted issues from the past with contemporary issues such as papal infallibility, Marian doctrine and marriage. In the second paper of this section, Archbishop Kevin McNamara in an adventurous way took the trinitarian model as the basis for his reflections on christian unity, but perhaps not surprisingly his conclusions reflected more established thinking. In the course of discussion, Archbishop McAdoo referred to the hierarchy of truths recognised by Vatican II and indicated that ARCIC had reached 'substantial agreement' on large areas of Christian teaching. Displaying a pragmatic approach he said:

We should use these partial agreements to bring about partial union rather than adopt an all-or-nothing approach.²²

On the subject of Principles and Practice, Bishop Cahal Daly opened by referring to 'frustrations' on the ICC side regarding the Ballymascanlon process, as well as the impatience of the media with progress or rather lack of it. He stressed the importance of not confusing the ecumenical agenda with the Northern Ireland situation, insisting that Irish Christians had to learn to talk to one another rather than 'at' one another. Referring to the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference's *Directory on Ecumenism*, Bishop Daly said that it stressed the priority of ecumenical education for clergy and laity alike. Turning to the topic of integrated education, he said that references to this in the recent interchurch report, *Violence in Ireland*, represented an 'agreed statement'.²³ However, Bishop Daly outlined some further steps that could be taken, particularly in the area of the sharing of teacher experiences and in research.

Replying, Dr Stanley Worrall said that principles were to be 'our servants, not our master'. Equally, in matters of doctrine, propositions are needed but we must not allow ourselves to become their slaves. Worrall said:

Theological dialogue is not aimed at cleverly accommodating

rival statements to each other, but reaching a better statement that transcends those formerly held.

This, indeed, was part of the stated methodology of ARCIC, a 'going behind' the differences. Worrall then spoke about integrated education in a way that Roman Catholic participants in the conference took as a direct attack. Daly and Worrall record that the discussion that followed was 'largely monopolised by a series of vigorous speeches in defence of Catholic schools'.²⁴

There were reports in 1977 on the Doctrine of Mary, Mixed Marriages and Baptism. In the first report it was indicated that the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption had been chosen for study as they were instances both of the exercise of papal authority in doctrine and of serious difference between the Churches. The common ground on Mary was stated and then followed a comparative survey of the Churches' individual approaches.

The Mixed Marriage report highlighted the fact that a permanent Joint Standing Committee on Mixed Marriages had been formed, in itself a major achievement. The report outlined problems experienced on both sides but concluded on the positive note of calling the Churches, in an increasingly secular age, to be vigorous in declaring the Christian view of marriage, and by calling the clergy of the different Churches not only to know their own Church's rules, but also the rules of any other Church involved in a mixed marriage situation in which they were ministering.

Finally, the working party's report on Baptism registered a wide agreement in baptismal theology, referring to Baptism as the 'foundation of Christian fellowship in the Church'. The representatives of the Churches in the working party recognized in one another's Churches the 'proper celebration' of Baptism and recommended that this be established as a principle of ecumenical and pastoral practice. In particular, the working party noted how the practice of infant baptism presumes that a process of 'formation in the Christian faith' will follow, and saw the practice as clearly showing 'the primacy of the divine action and the nature of baptism as sacrament of initiation'.²⁵

IV. 1980-1984

The Inter-Church Meeting did not assemble between 1977 and 1980 due to the deaths of Popes Paul VI and John Paul I, the illness and death of Cardinal Conway, the vacancy in Armagh leading ultimately

to the appointment of Cardinal O Fiaich, and the Papal Visit to Ireland in 1979.

At the 1980 Inter-Church Meeting survey papers on interchurch activities in Northern Ireland and the Republic were presented by Rev Dr Eric Gallagher and Fr Micheal Ledwith, under the topic, 'Experiments and Achievements in Co-operation, 1968-78'. These were substantial documents, both making specific reference to the charismatic movement as an ecumenical force, and the education and mixed marriages issues. Dr Gallagher's paper made special reference to the ecumenical experience of chaplaincy work, as in hospitals, prisons and universities. Eight discussion groups then focused on the various chapters in Daly and Gallagher's book, *Ballymascanlon*. This meeting was very much a stock taking exercise.

In 1983, major papers were presented on Christian Witness in a Secular World, introduced by Bishops Brendan Comiskey and Robin Eames (later Archbishop). Four prison chaplains presented material on The Pastoral Role of the Church to those in Prison. A final report from the working party on Marian Devotion in Ireland was presented. This document first of all set out the thinking of the Churches about Mary and then discussed six problem areas in Mariology from an ecumenical perspective. These six topics were all introduced by statements of common faith, before examining the differences chiefly between the Roman Catholic position and that of the Protestant Churches. In this area of theology which has not been widely explored ecumenically, it is worth noting the statements of common faith:

It is our common faith that Jesus Christ is both God and man in one person, and that in his life, death and resurrection he redeemed mankind. In his ascension our humanity is seen as permanently exalted in union with the divine. We, by faith, are united with Christ and so exalted to the divine fellowship. It is our common faith that Jesus Christ is the sole Mediator between God and man bridging the gulf between a Holy God and sinful man. It is our common faith that we are saved by grace as the unmerited favour of God to sinful men and women bringing his mercy and forgiveness of sins.

It is our common faith that the one source of salvation is God's revelation in Jesus Christ as attested in Holy Scripture. We teach also in common that the status and role of Mary is indicated explicitly in the New Testament.

It is our common understanding that the Scriptures are of

primary importance in the life of the Church, and that each of us has a view of the place of tradition and the need for correct interpretation by the Church of the true nature of the faith. It is our common belief that each aspect of the Christian faith coheres with the others and belongs to the integrity of divine revelation. 26

The document, in its statement on 'Mary in the Roman Catholic Church,' specifically referred to Marian practice in Ireland as follows

Marian devotions take many forms and Roman Catholics are free to choose between them. It would be rare in Ireland to find a practising Roman Catholic with no devotion whatever to Mary. Such devotions can take the form of (a) Thanksgiving for Mary, and what God has done through her; and (b) Imitation of Mary as a model of what God can bring about in personal holiness - and which we aspire to. Roman Catholic devotions assume that Mary, in common with the rest of the saints, but to an extraordinary degree, can effect for us before God that which our prayers, unaided, might not do. The titles applied to Mary may be broadly classified into two types. A first celebrates God's grace in her; a second her role as intercessor. Both types are very ancient.

Apparitions are a well known feature of Roman Catholic life. They do not, however, enjoy absolute approbation from Church authority, even though the presence of a Pope at a shrine is significant and persuasive. The role of a shrine is always primarily that of a place of prayer, which is usually Christocentric and eucharistic. Any 'message' associated with it is to be judged by the norms of faith of the Church. For example, the message of Lourdes is one of prayer and penance, which are biblical themes.

By 1984, the Church, Scripture and Authority working party had produced Bible Studies on St. John's Gospel, the Psalms and the Acts of the Apostles. In 1984, the Inter-Church Meeting discussed the final report, Unity Through Baptism, introduced by Dr Dennis Cooke, Principal of Edgehill Theological College. The Unity Through Baptism interchurch working party recommended the issuing of a Common Certificate of Baptism. The Department of Theological Questions, on its formation, entered into negotiations with SPCK and a certificate was produced in 1988.

In the afternoon session of the 1984 Inter-Church Meeting there was discussion on recommendations from the Steering Committee on the future organisation of Inter-Church Meetings and 'liaison machinery' - a paper produced by Fr (now Mgr) Micheal Ledwith and Dr David Poole.

The Ledwith/Poole document was entitled 'The Inter-Church Meeting: Organisation and Structure' and included reference to the fact that the Meeting had, in recent years, been 'trenchantly criticised', continuing:

Questions have been raised about its progress, its purpose and its intent. These criticisms have come from its member Churches and also from the mass media. These criticisms can be divided into two groups: a) the assertion that the Meeting has avoided adequate discussion on certain sensitive topics; b) the allegation that the Meeting has failed to make spectacular ecumenical progress, or to make progressive decisions on behalf of its participating Churches.²⁷

However, Ledwith and Poole pointed out that the public and irregular nature of the Meeting made it difficult to consider sensitive subjects, and that those appointed to represent the Churches did not have the authority to make decisions on behalf of the Churches. They also drew attention to the 'unique' nature of the Inter-Church Meeting, possibly in the whole world, as 'a forum of discussion and exchange between Roman Catholic and Protestant Church leadership.' Ballymascanlon also set an 'example' which others had followed. The document proposed a regular Inter-Church Meeting, at least every 18 months, together with the formation of an Inter-Church Committee with broad terms of reference, which would convene between Inter-Church Meetings. The Ledwith/Poole paper envisaged three Departments: Theological Questions, Social Issues and Mission. Arrangements were also suggested for secretarial support and financing of the structures. These proposals were accepted by the Churches and ultimately came into effect, with the exception of the Department of Mission which never materialized.

This 1984 paper marked the beginning of a new and more dynamic phase of the Inter-Church Meeting, the formation of the Inter-Church Committee being a particularly important development.

In December 1984 a working party on Education held its first meeting, eventually reporting in 1987 and identifying difficulties for RE teaching in schools.

V. 1986-1992

The 1986 Inter-Church Meeting considered the report of the new Department of Social Issues (DSI), *The Church and the Technological Age*. The DSI had been formed as a continuation of the former ICC/Roman Catholic Church Joint Group on Social Problems. The Joint Group, thus integrated into the new IICM structure, had already produced a series of reports since its formation in 1970: *Drug Abuse (1972)*, *Housing in Northern Ireland (1973)*, *The Use of Alcohol (1974)*, *Underdevelopment in Rural Ireland (1976)*, *Violence in Ireland (1976)*, *The Environment (1980)* and *Leisure in Ireland (1982)*. The *Violence in Ireland* report, by special permission from the Churches, was a particular landmark but there was no machinery for forwarding the recommendations of the working party. However, the report remained an important point of reference.

The Joint Group had set up working parties to produce reports and the same methodology was pursued by the new DSI.

'The Church and the Technological Age', the first of the reports under the new DSI structure, was therefore the topic for the 1986 Inter-Church Meeting, the report having been published the previous year. It was marked by an essentially optimistic approach to the topic, focusing in particular on the impact of the new technology on work and education. The working party's terms of reference had been:

1. To give consideration to how technological change is affecting society and is likely to do so in the future, both positively and negatively with special regard to education and work.
2. To give consideration to the implications and opportunities of these changes for the Church and its Mission, and to make recommendations.

The approach of the working party was not blindly optimistic, however, but constructive and pastoral in over-all tone. The theological basis was a clearly biblical one:

The goodness of creation (Gen. 1:31) extends to the unlocking of the mysteries that lie at the heart of matter by contemporary science, and to the particular genius of man as the toolmaker, the developer of ever more sophisticated and powerful tools to mould the raw materials which the Earth provides into an ever more abundant flow of goods which meet human needs and improve the quality of life."

In 1987, the Inter-Church Meeting considered another report from the DSI, *Marriage and the Family in Ireland Today*. The working party had been asked to present a report that would help people to understand how social, cultural and economic change affected family life, the factors involved in the increased rate of marital breakdown, and to make recommendations on how the Church could best prepare people for marriage and support the family in times of stress. In the Foreword, it is affirmed that marriage and the family are 'areas of great joy and fulfilment and also that can be filled with potential for misunderstanding and conflict'. The report presented a factual picture, the Christian teaching and recent challenges, suggestions for better support for marriage and the family by Church and society, and conclusions and recommendations.

The 1989 Inter-Church Meeting was on the theme of 'Youth Work and the Churches' and used material from the DSI working party on this topic, the report of which, *Young People and the Church*, was published in the following year. The working party had been listening to the views of a cross-section of young people so that the report would not be 'about what adults think about young people'.

The Inter-Church Meeting of 1990 considered a further DSI report, this time on *The Challenge of the City*. The terms of reference of the working party which produced this report were to give consideration to (1) the changes currently going on in urban society, and (2) their challenge to the Churches and to society at large. The working party chose to concentrate on the problems of the poor and marginalized. The report warned:

Society puts itself at risk and can be torn apart where there is growing wealth, comfort and opportunities of choice for some alongside powerlessness, poverty and lack of choice for others.

This, the report suggested, constituted the challenge to the Churches, to the governments and to society generally. An Agenda for Action was appended to the report.

There was a review of the structures and administration of the IICM in 1991, leading to the appointment of a part-time Administrative Officer, Sr. Roisin Hannaway, whose work has involved servicing the Inter-Church Committee, the two Departments, and the organising of related conferences. In 1991 the Department of Theological Questions published *Reading the Bible Together*, being Bible studies for Advent and Lent.

The theme of the 1992 Inter-Church Meeting was 'Irish Christians in a New Europe' and the two keynote speakers were Dr Dennis Kennedy, formerly Head of the Commission of the EC Office in Northern Ireland, and Fr Noel Treanor, a member of the Secretariat of the Commission des Episcopats de la Communaute Europeene (COMESCE).

Speaking on the topic of 'The New Europe - Market Place or Moral Force?', Dr Kennedy noted that the EC in its historical context was about moving away from the 'limited and even dangerous' concept of the nation state, and declared that of all the groups contemplating the New Europe, the Christian Churches should be 'the last to be doing so behind the ramparts of traditional nationalism'.²⁹

Fr Treanor in turn spoke about 'The Vocation of the Churches in the New Europe'. He saw evangelisation and ecumenism as 'essential and interdependent components' of the Churches' response to the New Europe for, as elsewhere, the Churches' vocation here was 'to kindle and nourish faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and to articulate the values and lifestyle flowing from that faith'.

VI. 1993-1998

The October 1993 Inter-Church Meeting was the first residential and was widely regarded as one of the most successful, if not the most successful, ever held. The topic, 'Sectarianism,' led to very searching, open and frank reflection together. The basis for these discussions was the discussion document produced earlier in 1993 by the DSI and entitled *Sectarianism: A Discussion Document*.

Although there had been earlier suggestions that sectarianism as a topic should be a subject for a working party, it was the raising of this in 1987 by Archbishop Eames and Cardinal O Fiaich that led to the first meeting in 1991 of a duly appointed working party under the leadership of Mary McAleese (later President of Ireland) and John Lampen (a Quaker working in peacemaking in Londonderry). The *Violence in Ireland* report of 1976 had addressed the contemporary situation in Ireland quite directly, claiming that 'Ireland needs a programme to combat sectarianism wherever it is found'.³⁰ The following were the terms of reference of the Sectarianism working party:

- (i) To look at how the different Churches have regarded each other in their doctrinal statements and formularies, and in their

public stances, and what is the present situation.

(ii) To look at the role of the different Churches in Ireland in creating and maintaining separation, division and conflict - if any.

(iii) To look at how sectarianism may have operated in such areas as education, jobs, housing, ghettos, justice and criminal issues, the influence of the Loyalist and Nationalist Orders.

(iv) To look at what have been the effects, for the Churches and communities, of the substantial degree of identification of Protestantism with Unionism and Catholicism with Nationalism.

(v) To make proposals to the Churches that might promote reconciliation and positive respect for difference.

The discussion document included a working definition of sectarianism before going on more than to fulfil its terms of reference.³¹ The document led to the setting forth of 'Ways Forward and Recommendations', itemised under twelve headings. A series of appendices discussed how the Churches viewed one another, segregation, the Orange Order and the Ancient Order of Hibernians, law and order, and schooling. There was some pre-publication controversy between the working party and the DSI over two documents which later were published separately (one by Joe Liechty entitled *Roots of Sectarianism: Chronology and Reflections*, and the other by Gary Mason, *How Should We Evangelical Christians handle our Differences with those in the Roman Catholic Church?*). However, to be fair, it should be recognized that the decision not to publish these in the document was partly due simply to considerations of the actual length of the text.

This major discussion document was widely studied in ecumenical groups throughout Ireland. Also in 1993 the Department of Theological Questions produced the booklets *Salvation and Grace* and *Ecumenical Principles*, both of which were the fruit of extended study.

Since 1993 the Irish Order of Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has been produced under IICM auspices.

The Inter-Church Meeting of 1995 considered, topically, the theme of 'The Churches' Particular Contribution to Peace at this Time,' introduced by Bishop James Mehaffey, Mr David Porter and Bishop Michael Dallat. The Department of Theological Questions (DTQ) also contributed to this meeting under the topic, *The Challenges Facing Us in Ireland Today*, introducing the theme on the basis of progress being made in the Department's own studies. It was felt at the time that, one

year after the Loyalist and Republican ceasefires and after more than twenty-five years of violence, it was an appropriate time for the Churches to look at the issues and challenges facing them in this situation. It was also felt to be an appropriate time for the Churches to consider some of the wider changes going on in Irish society at the time, and their implications for the Churches.

The 1997 Inter-Church Meeting considered the report from the Department of Theological Questions, *Freedom, Justice and Responsibility in Ireland Today*. These three topics were described in the report as 'the ingredients of true peace'. This report was an exercise in contextual theology, considering the role of the Churches within the political context of contemporary Ireland, the Churches and the caring society, and the Churches and pluralism. The concluding Agenda for the Churches highlighted three areas: first, the need for a review of the Churches' pastoral strategies in the light of the context of communal bitterness and division; second, a possible confession of guilt and mutual commitment to reconciliation on the part of the Churches; and third, the concept of ecumenical tithing as had been previously proposed by Fr Michael Hurley SJ, with the aim of bringing ecumenism from the periphery to the centre of Church life. This document from the Department of Theological Questions was well researched and provided the Inter-Church Meeting with substantial material for discussion.

VII. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

After the 1984 re-structuring of the Inter-Church Meeting an increasing momentum in its work is to be discerned: there was a visit of the Churches from the then Soviet Union to Ireland in 1989; there have been meetings with representatives of the British Churches every two years since 1993; there was a joint CEC/CCEE visit to Ireland in 1995; and the Inter-Church Committee has dealt with a very wide spectrum of issues, such as the political and community situation in Northern Ireland, Sunday trading, interchurch marriage, intercommunion and the Millennium. The work of the Department of Social Issues has moved from being a body setting up working parties to produce reports to being a meeting of the people with responsibility for social concerns in the Churches. A very successful Poverty Hearing was held in 1997. The Department of Theological Questions has studied, discussed and reported on theological issues both classical and arising from the contemporary Irish context. All of this work has been carried out with limited secretarial back-up and reliance on the Irish

Council of Churches for providing much of the servicing.

The Inter-Church Meeting has clearly developed considerably over the years, from the first tentative encounter at Ballymascanlon in 1973 to the present day working pattern in which working together has become second nature to those involved. It is difficult to see how, given the circumstances and attitudes in the Churches, the Meeting might have developed differently or more quickly. Its development at each stage has been to meet the needs of the Churches. Today, reconstituting the Inter-Church Meeting to make it the primary and main national ecumenical body in Ireland seems the obvious next step; such are the needs of today's Churches in Ireland that ecumenical partnership on a Protestant-only basis, or indeed on a 'two sides' (Protestant and Roman Catholic) basis, has become anachronistic. There are not two sides to the Christian Churches in Ireland; we are all one together in a rich diversity. Any renewed structure must attempt to move on from the 'two sides' mentality that has been our way of thinking, for Christianity in Ireland is no longer about Protestants and Roman Catholics, but about all our different Churches in dialogue and co-operation, each denomination bringing its own particular faith-emphases, traditions, gifts, experiences and richness to the ecumenical *koinonia*. There are certainly nontheological reasons for the persistence of the 'two sides' mentality, but the Irish Churches must step away from this caricature and develop a new and broader self-understanding.

Clearly, an immense amount of work has been carried out under the auspices of the Inter-Church meeting since 1973. There have been shortcomings, not least in the areas of administrative support and follow-up, but the working together in itself has produced the result of a deepened sense of fellowship among the Churches, a depth of fellowship that simply did not exist twenty-five years ago.

It is often suggested that 'top-level' ecumenism is irrelevant to the local scene. This is a blinkered view, for our experience in Ireland has been that what has happened at Ballymascanlon and at successive Inter-Church Meetings has produced an atmosphere in which things have begun to happen locally. There is such a thing as ecumenical leadership that results in new relationships being formed between local parishes and congregations. Certainly, some of the topics considered particularly at the earlier Inter-Church Meetings were at an academic level and would have been at a remove from the immediate concerns of the person in the pew. Indeed, the media found it a puzzling

situation at times. But these things had to be worked through. And by the Churches very meeting together - which could not go unnoticed by the public at large because of the media attention - the way was opened up for local initiatives following the Ballymascanlon example. These did not come flooding, but did come gradually and in due time so that today there is more going on at the local level than ever before. As an example of the awareness of the importance of translating the Ballymascanlon experience to the local parishes and congregations, the Inter-Church Meeting over the years organized 'mini-Ballymascanlons' and more recently meetings for local ecumenical groups.³²

The story of the Inter-Church Meeting over these twenty-five years has been one of the Churches growing together. That is a process that can only continue and cannot be reversed. Although there can always be difficulties, setbacks and indeed even crises - as in any set of relationships - progress so far indicates that we can certainly look forward to our future together under God with considerable anticipation.

- 1 The Moravian Church and the Salvation Army decided not to take part in the first meeting at Ballymascanlon. The former took part from 1974 and the latter from 1983.
- 2 Cahal Daly and Stanley Worrall, *Ballymascanlon*, CJL/Veritas 1978, p10).
- 3 See *The Furrow*, January 1974, pp 4-13. 4 *ibid.*, pp 14-29.
- 5 *ibid.*, pp 29-33.
- 6 *ibid.*, pp 34-43.
- 7 *The Furrow*, *op.cit.*, p 36.

- 8 *ibid.*, p 37, FJ Van Beeck, *Towards Ecumenical Understanding of the Sacraments in Doctrinal Development and Christian Unity*, ed. N. Lash, p216, n. 80.
- 9 *Ballymascanlon*, pp 83f.
- 10 *ibid.*, p 87.

- 11 Cf. *Ecumenical Relations in Ireland*, ICC 1988, p 2. The 1974 and 1975 meetings were adjournments of the 1973 meeting.
- 12 *Ballymascanlon*, pp 30f.
- 13 *ibid.*, p48.
- 14 *ibid.*, p53.
- 15 *ibid.*, p64.
- 16 *ibid.*, p71.

17 *ibid.*, p91.

18 *ibid.*, p102.

19 *ibid.*, p108.

20 *ibid.*, pp109ff.

21 *ibid.*, p112.

22 *ibid.*, p121.

23 *ibid.*, p125.

24 *ibid.*, p129.

25 *ibid.*, p44.

26 Archives.

27 Archives.

28 Press release.

29 Press release.

30 As in *Sectarianism, IICM 1993*, p7.

31 The working definition of Sectarianism was as follows: '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.' (*Sectarianism*, p 8).

32 Regional interchurch meetings were held in Mayo and Carlow in 1988 and in Enniskillen in 1994. Week-ends for local ecumenical groups have been held in 1995, 1997 and one is planned for 1999. Irish Ecumenical News has been circulated to local ecumenical groups and interested individuals.