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TRAINERS AND PRACTITIONERS

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BUMPER WINTER ISSUE!

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# Community Relations Council

## COMMENT

### Marea Robertson - an appreciation

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This is a bumper winter edition; it is Journal policy to give 'value for money'!

Comments, letters and articles are welcome, as are suggestions for features you would like to see.

#### Editorial panel members

Fergus Cumiskey  
Rob Fairmichael  
Roisin McGlone  
Paul Murray  
Colin Neilands

The deadline for articles for the next issue is  
**20th February 1995**

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Cover illustration from  
*What Do You Feed Your Donkey On?*  
*Old Rhymes from a Belfast Childhood*  
collected by Colette O'Hare.  
Illustrated by Jenny Rodwell

The views expressed are those of the contributors and should not necessarily be attributed to the Community Relations Council.

I met Marea Robertson for the first time in February 1990 at Dolphinton a village outside Edinburgh. The setting was quite superb - snowy rolling hills surrounding a rambling Victorian country house.

My first impression of this bolshy Australian woman left me reeling. Her feedback was incisively direct, her caustic humour infectious, her challenging confrontations equalled by her sincerity, generosity and the warmth of her compassionate support.

In their wisdom, the Scottish Health Education Group (the equivalent of our Health Boards) commissioned Marea and her colleague Chris Cherry to devise the sixth and most advanced in a series of Personal and Professional development programmes to train counsellors and group workers in Scotland. Marea was invited to pilot the materials and teach the Advanced Group Work Skills programme in Belfast by two leading voluntary organisations. Marea's direct approach, human warmth and professionalism assured her a formidable reputation which some used to frighten themselves and others welcomed as refreshingly clear and nourishing. By May 1990, in liaison with Gestalt Training Services, a Europe wide consultancy, and group workers from a range of disciplines in Northern Ireland, Marea established the first Gestalt training group in Belfast. Two groups have now completed 3-4 year basic Gestalt group work training and a 3rd group is in its second year.

In her short relationship with Ireland Marea Robertson touched the hearts of many and encouraged the creativity and enlivenment of her clients, training groups and friends. Her pioneering commitment to this place resulted in ultimately selling her farm in Scotland and moving permanently to Belfast last year. She had plans to develop outreach work throughout the North and to initiate with Irish colleagues a Gestalt institute here. On the evening of Tuesday 22 November Marea suffered a brain haemorrhage slipping into a coma that evening. Throughout her short illness friends, trainees and clients held a vigil by her bedside in the Royal Victoria Hospital, as her family and colleagues came to be with her in her final hours. In the best traditions of Irish wakes, stories of her childhood and nursing career in Australia were exchanged for contemporary reverie. By Friday 25 November Marea's son Matthew had returned from Australia, her sister Marie-Ann had flown in from Vancouver and colleagues and friends had made their way from London, Milan and Scotland to bid her their fondest final goodbyes. Marea died peacefully at 6.10 am on the morning of Saturday 26 November.

Marea had suffered much in recent years particularly as the result of her husband Mark's sudden death on St. Patrick's Day 1992. In the past year she had found happiness and a home in Belfast with her partner Dagmar.

In the few years since our first meeting Marea was in turn my therapist, supervisor, trainer and friend. She supported and supervised my co-working relationship with Marie Quiry. More than 50 trainees have completed CRC's Advanced Group Work Skills programme as a result of our collaboration. I am very glad to have known Marea Robertson. She was an inspiring teacher, generous friend and colleague, and a warm and powerful woman. Marea's legacy to Belfast is sustained by the energy and commitment of we who knew and worked with her and the learning connections we make with others encouraging excitement and human growth through awareness and activism. Marea was a joyous person, a pioneer and a courageous woman who lived life with vigour and passion. I feel cheated by her death at 48. It was too soon. Marea Robertson is missed greatly and was much loved, no greater testimony needed.

**Fergus Cumiskey**

*Philip Watt*

# Towards a human rights model of community relations work

It is a sad fact that after 25 years of Fair Employment legislation, official reports and Community Relations initiatives that there has been little significant improvement in redressing discrimination in employment in Northern Ireland. Recent research has indicated that Catholic males, particularly those aged 20-24, are still almost twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestants.

The Northern Ireland Office has indicated that it will be undertaking a five year review of the effectiveness of the Fair Employment legislation, perhaps it should also take the opportunity to extend this review to other measures aimed at promoting equity of treatment including the range of measures which fall under the broad category of "Community Relations".

It would, in my view, be unfortunate if Community Relations work was discarded in the wake of the developing peace process, thus repeating the fate of previous initiatives such as the Community Relations Commission. If Community Relations work was discarded in such an abrupt fashion, it would bring about renewed questioning about the motivation for its existence in the first place. However, perhaps now is an opportune time to look at the type and effectiveness of particular models of Community Relations which have been developed to date.

The main policy objectives of the British government's Community Relations strategy can be summarised as to:

- ensure that all sides of the community enjoy equality of opportunity and equity of treatment
- develop cross community contact and co-operation
- encourage and develop mutual respect and understanding

From this policy statement a range of initiatives have developed including the Community Relations Council,

exchanges/contacts between Schools and Youth Organisations and the employment of Local Authority Community Relations Officers.

Since the late 1980's there have been four identifiable models of Community Relations work:

- Education for Mutual Understanding
- Conflict Resolution through mediation
- Anti-sectarian approaches
- Human rights approaches

Most Community Relations work has tended to concern the first two models.

## **Education for Mutual Understanding**

In all models of Community Relations work, education is recognised as a key strategy and EMU is now a clear requirement in school and statutory youth service curriculum. This model stresses the acceptance of religious diversity and mutual understanding through cross-community contact. Hostility between groups, it is argued would begin to be addressed at a grass root level through mechanisms such as “prejudice reduction” workshops and the promotion of “toleration” between the two communities.

The weaknesses of this model have been well documented in Britain where the equivalent of EMU is “multi-cultural education”. Exposure to cultural diversity would, it was contended in Britain in the 1950’s and 60’s, lead to black people being accepted by whites. This approach has been criticised for its failure to address the power differential in the relations between groups with and its portrayal of the State as a neutral arbitrator. In policy terms it allowed for the development of a Race Relations Act in 1976 while, at the same time, blatantly racist immigration laws were being enacted. Critics of EMU and multi culturalism would argue that education is a key element in addressing inequality but only as part of an overall strategy and that more crucially education policies policy should reflect that the most insidious discrimination occurs at an institutional level, not just an individual level.

## **Conflict Resolution through Mediation**

There are a number of different models of conflict resolution which usually focus on the role of an independent mediator or arbitrator to solve disputes. Following early criticisms of the notion that mediators can be neutral outsiders and further, that some resolution models end up blaming the victims, this model has sometimes been redefined. In its modified form, conflict is now described as being rooted in the totality of experience and in our relationships with each other and the usefulness of mediators was not so

much in their skills but in their own knowledge of change and the possibilities they have to allow others to see each other anew.

Critics of this model continue to argue there is always potential for manipulation from a mediation approach and its success largely depends on a willingness of the opposed parties to agree that resolution is needed. However conflict resolution by mediation has been seen to have some potential albeit in certain limited circumstances. The role of mediation in the talks between the PLO and the Israeli Government is one example of usefulness of mediation at a national level. There are also examples of new mediation strategies being developed by black community groups in the United States which have avoided some pitfalls of previous models which could have application to Northern Ireland.

## **Anti-Sectarianism**

A policy most often associated with the Trade Union movement in Northern Ireland and in some Community Relations work undertaken by voluntary groups. This strategy has been largely aimed at drawing up policies aimed at reducing intimidation in the workplace or as a statement of intent to non-discrimination as an addition to an Equal Opportunities policy.

There are some examples of this policy having some success at a shopfloor level and Trade Unionists sometimes put themselves at risk, to try and ensure that there is no overt discrimination within the workplace. As such it has some links with the mediation model of conflict resolution. However anti-sectarian models tend to be criticised for their potential to adopt the language of equality whilst ignoring the policies which perpetuate covert discrimination.

The contradictions of the policy are that covert or “indirect” discrimination may continue at an institutional level. For instance, many Trade Unions in the public sector continue

to insist on internal recruitment within the workplace and resist the concept of open recruitment. Obviously, if there are limited numbers of Catholics in the existing workforce religious imbalances can be perpetuated because change can be painfully slow. Open recruitment is a key element in a broader policy which works towards equality of opportunity.

## Human Rights Approach

This approach is a less common strategy, in some cases organisations which adopt this approach will resent a Community Relations tag being applied. This approach recognises that discrimination is complex and multi-layered with three basic levels of the personal, the institutional level and at State level. It recognises that sectarianism is the produce of a political and economic context which involves relationships of domination and exploitation between groups. It demands rejection of an approach based on toleration, as no one tolerates things which are basically unacceptable and focuses our attention on societal structures including the institutions involved in policing and the justice system.

Such a broad human rights approach can inform and reshape education, mediation and anti-sectarian approaches and can be more directly related to the community development work in the most marginalised area.

Critics of this approach argue that this approach is too political and the boundaries with political activism are too

blurred. Proponents of a human rights approach would however highlight that an effective anti-sectarian approach has to be political as it demands us to examine the issue of how power is exercised by whom and for what ends?

In conclusion any strategies which are entitled "Community Relations" must be viewed with caution. In its worst form Community Relations work can actually legitimise discredited institutions and policies, and can end up blaming the group which has been discriminated against.

Despite its many pitfalls there are examples of existing Community Relations work making a useful contribution towards, if not by addressing inequalities in Northern Ireland at least, contributing to an environment where change can take place. This role, if it is to be effective in the future, should not be about finding an "internal solution" but should be extended to the relations between communities in the island of Ireland as a whole.

The role of Community Relations strategies is potentially greater now than it has ever been in the last 25 years. However this potential is at least partly dependent on the ability of the proponents of Community Relations to shake off its tentative and conservative image and on the government radically overhauling its half hearted, fragmentary and, as in the case of employment, ineffectual policies ranged against discrimination. 🐾

*Tanya Gallagher, Project Officer with the Peace and Reconciliation Group, L'Derry*

# Dealing with change in a voluntary organisation- *P.R.G.: A Case study*

## The Beginnings

The Peace and Reconciliation Group has been in existence since 1976. It was formed by a number of women in response to the continuing upsurge in violence in Derry at that time, 1976 saw the most deaths in this city since the onset of the 'troubles'. That year also saw the formation of The Peace People in Belfast and it wasn't long before the group in Derry became known as the Derry branch of the Peace People. This lasted until 1978 when they became known as the Peace and Reconciliation Group. This was the first major change which PRG undertook and it was done because of differences in the organisation's methods on the best way forward for achieving peace. At the time the PRG felt that the Peace People were too high profile and that the media were manipulating much of that organisation's work. Funding the work of the PRG at that time was also a major factor in the break up of the relationship as the Derry group were always feeling like the poor cousin begging for money. With an autonomous charitable status this problem was immediately rectified.

How did PRG handle this change? The new independence from the Peace People brought renewed vigour and enthusiasm to the work of the PRG. They saw the need to work only in a local context trying to initiate changes within key areas and key players of the time. The grass roots nature of the group at that time seemed to attract ordinary working class individuals from both sides of the community and they were successful at attracting and using ex paramilitaries looking for another way forward. Because the group were not outwardly Christian and not highly political or high profile it was deemed a safe haven for those wanting to become involved in practical community relations work.

## Building the foundations

What was/is practical community relations work? The PRG identified areas of need within the city limits: the need to bring individuals and groups from both sides of the community together to improve communication and understanding across the divide. The need to mediate between two or more radically opposing sets of people who seemed unable or unwilling to communicate with each other. The need to promote understanding and tolerance for the diverse opinions of both traditions. The

need to reduce tensions within the city in order to enable communication between both communities to take place. Activities in those early days included non threatening events such as cross community sports and social evenings between adults and youths from flashpoint areas as well as meetings with key individuals and groups to discuss the local tensions.

The PRG saw that in order to begin to do any of this work it needed to build relationships with all the key players of the time: the RUC, the British Army, the Paramilitaries, community groups and individuals with influence, i.e. politicians and respected individuals within both communities.

The early eighties brought more fear and tension with the onset of the hunger strikes. Would the PRG's contacts and relentless efforts to build contacts pay off? It was during this time that the PRG really began to succeed in its quest for patience, tolerance, understanding and above all communication. An anti-rumour service was established at that time enabling workers to respond quickly to particular problems and areas of concern in an effort to overcome the obvious breakdown in communication which gave rise to fear and rumour. The accepted neutrality of its minibus, premises and staff/volunteers was testament to the efforts of this group in identifying areas of need in this city in the late 1970's and early 1980's.

## Orientation

In the mid to late 80's the PRG seemed to appear stagnant, relying on the past projects and contacts which the group had made and the work which seemed more repetitive. However, more change was occurring in the group. The PRG had received ACE posts which brought in new and younger staff members. This brought with it not only renewed energy but also new ideas on how to achieve the aims and objectives of the PRG. Some of these ideas included networking with other agencies, increasing community relations work in schools, youth clubs and community groups, by organising and facilitating seminars and conferences. However, whilst the ACE posts brought in new blood it was only temporary and it was soon discovered that it also brought with it a lack of continuity. The nature of the group's funding was also changing. The group could no longer rely on good will alone to receive

money. It was becoming increasingly difficult to justify the funds which they were receiving and most trust funds and agencies now required methods of applications, strategies and evaluation. This was a new challenge to many of the established group members who had put in a lot of hard work, commitment and energy over the years. The injection of new members and the increased professionalism of the way to carry out community relations work instigated a series of changes in policy, structure and programme within the PRG, a lot of which were not easy on both the group and individuals within it. Changed circumstances and conflict of ideas culminated in the departure of various prominent members of the group who on reflection gave so generously and unselfishly of their time and dedication to peace.

The establishment of the Community Relations Council brought peace work into the 1990's, with its professional approach and skilled workers who assisted many peace organisations to further their aims and objectives. PRG took advantage of the CRC's help and support and in 1990 secured two three year posts. This was of great benefit to the work as it provided much needed continuity and enabled the PRG to be in a secure position to develop its base and further its contacts. It also enabled the group to look to the future and develop its strategy to cope with the changing times. The workload increased and the PRG found itself becoming involved in new areas of work: an increase in liaison with RUC/Army in the form of meetings and group discussions, the work on intimidation and harassment, initiating community awareness on issues such as community development in Protestant areas, increase in security forces accountability and awareness of harassment and intimidation. There has always been a dilemma around the issue of how much information to give on the work surrounding the security forces and the paramilitaries. The group seldom goes public on this issue purely to protect both the client in need of help and the staff involved in this liaison work. This workload brought with it a new sense of purpose and an injection of energy and enthusiasm for the work. However the increase in funding and resources brought with it not only a sense of security but also a need to justify the work being funded. This meant that the group had to monitor and evaluate its work.

### Reforming a Strategy

In 1993 the group held its first evaluation day which proved to be the start of a process of evaluation which is still ongoing. This day was given over to an investigation of the current well being of the PRG. Great areas of programme and structure for the group were being looked

at and questioned. Recommendations on changes to the group structure were agreed and a further meeting was organised to discuss the creation of working parties to look at issues raised during the day.

In 1993 the CCRU also commissioned an independent evaluator to look at and appraise the work of the PRG. Again this proved to be a trying time for staff and management because they had never had to deal with constructive criticism of its work from an independent assessor. The evaluation provoked a number of emotions but in retrospect it appears to have been a very successful exercise, allowing the group to see not only its positive side but also its negative side, in particular the poor communication due to lack of structure. This enabled the group to take stock and begin a process of moving forward and dealing with our weaknesses as well as consolidating our strengths.

Another evaluation day was held in June 1994. The purpose of this day was to provide staff and members of the voluntary management committee of the PRG with an opportunity to discuss the recently received Evaluation Report, in the presence of, and together with Joe Hinds, Development Officer of CRC. Among many learning points to emerge from the open and forthright exchanges in the morning were: the importance of acknowledging the strengths of the PRG, the value of an evaluation process for a voluntary group as it develops, the need to face certain key issues as the PRG develops, the outline funders use in decision making and where PRG might fit in, and finally the considerable degree to which the meeting's set of 'important issues' matched the list in the CCRU evaluation report, indicating that the PRG is well on its way to addressing them, following on from their first evaluation day in September 1993.

### Looking ahead

In PRG there is now a definite sense of new ground being moved to and an understanding that while considerably more work lies ahead, a strategy for approaching this work has begun. PRG has learned that conflict is difficult to deal with at times but when dealt with sensitively and confidentially, it can be a positive catalyst for change. In an ever changing environment, flexibility must be a key ingredient in our ability to meet the needs of the community. The PRG has many years of experience to build on, embracing the opportunities presented by change, this experience from yesterday can become the tools needed to do the work for tomorrow. ☺

*If anyone requires further information on the Peace and Reconciliation Group, they can contact the office at 18b London Street, L'Derry or telephone (01504) 369206.*

*Aidan Bunting, Community Relations Development Officer, Omagh*

# Danish Folk High Schools: Learning for Life

Since 1990 I have been working as a Community Relations Officer in Omagh District Council, and I have developed a commitment to a Community Relations/Community Development twin track approach. This means offering individuals and groups opportunities for personal and community development. I feel it is important that people have access to these opportunities in order to develop self confidence and self esteem.

With this in mind I set out to explore how self development is promoted in education/training schemes. Research and discussion gave me an interest in finding out about the Danish system of education and training. I was particularly interested in the concept behind the Danish Folk High Schools and Education for Life.

To understand what is important about the Folk High Schools we have to look further than the subjects they teach. For one of the basic underlying educational principles is that the truly essential factor is not the subjects taught, but the people.

## **The Folk High School System - Background**

The background to the Folk High School system includes both how you organise your approach to life and, historically, the farmers moving to political power. The country was ruled by estate owners and the economy was bad; the farmers got mortgages to buy the land off the estate owners. Pride was instilled in the farmers with having their own land, and even though they had to struggle a lot more it was for themselves.

So within a couple of decades the farmers developed self esteem and self consciousness because of their new status. This was aided through the church which was at this time a state church. The philosopher Grundtvig was a very important influence; he touched on something that could be used - basically what he said was that you should be human first and then Christian. This philosophy was very radical because it challenged the churches' teaching since Luther. Luther taught that you always have a duty and after you fulfil your duty (whatever it may be) you can relax and be human - but this never happens because there is always another duty, another sin that you have to deal with. It becomes very internal.

It is interesting how the churches' influence is obvious in Ireland and Spain, and also in Denmark, if you know what to look for. The change in the Danish church happened that first you are human, then you are Christian, thus focusing on living and doing what you can do and then afterwards you can consider whether you are a good Christian. You really do not have the right to condemn anybody, it is not for you to do that, it is for God. In religious terms there was a battleground between the strict Lutheran approach and the Grundtvigian philosophy in the 50's and 60's. In Denmark the church is no longer a state church and it now has no influence in politics.

## **Main Aspects**

The main aspects of Folk High Schools are:

1. They are required to provide a general broadening education;
2. forbidden to compete with traditional specialist educational establishments;
3. they are unable to award marks, grades or to provide specific vocational training;
4. the principal task is to educate students for life - to shed light on some of the basic questions surrounding life for people in Denmark today both as individuals and as members of society.

Of course this does not mean that what is taught in the various subjects is immaterial or not taken seriously. On the contrary, since there are no prescribed syllabuses, no exams, no institutional constraints, no marking, no swotting, the Folk High Schools have to rely entirely on the willingness and commitment of their students and the ability of the teachers to motivate them.

The Day High Schools which began in 1970's arose to meet the perceived need for local, day-time programmes for the unemployed in towns and cities. The Folk High Schools are almost exclusively residential.

The Folk High schools are residential centres with staff and students living, eating and sharing the daily routines together for the duration of the course. About 50% of the school's budget comes from government with the rest coming from students' fees and the school's own revenue from hiring out their own facilities. Student grants are based on their ability to pay and unemployed students receive their benefits while attending FHS or DHS. FHS and DHS together with the WEA in Denmark work closely with the Department of Employment when recruiting students for courses. The DHS arose to fill a perceived need for local, day-time programmes, particularly for the unemployed.

It is essential to be flexible in your approach to the disadvantaged and unemployed and not to try to force them to join traditional training schemes. It is important to be creative and have funding for special projects, e.g. cultural, music, film, video, media. If a person can come to understand why they should take a course or do some training and agree to do it then much more can be achieved.

Day High Schools have been important as a cross-cultural educational and integrational vehicle, for example for Turkish women who are not allowed to go to school with men for cultural and religious reasons. They needed the school as an outlet because they live separately from the rest of the community and felt very isolated. In this context they could attend classes for unemployed women from a variety of cultural backgrounds, enabling each to learn about the other and the skills needed for effective participation in society (including Danish, mathematics, society, and communication).

More broadly, the courses and workshops on offer in Odense Daghojskole (Day High School), for example, includes the following: computers, psychology of teaching

children, literature workshop, music and drama, wool and textiles, fashion and design, the political system of Denmark, home decorating, family history, creative workshop with painting and sculpture, ceramics, silk, leather, jewellery, weaving, making masks, old games, singing, art history, creative writing, bicycle tours, newspaper workshop, you and culture, study trip by train through Denmark.

The concept of **Education for Life** I feel could be very relevant for Northern Ireland. Our education system with its selection at 11, brands a large number of children as failures. We also have a large number of teenagers leaving school with little or no qualifications and with little self confidence or esteem.

From a Northern Ireland point of view collaboration with Denmark on a trans-national programme involving the development of teacher skills and cooperation on training education for the unemployed would be a good first step. This would involve teachers, civil servants - Department of Employment, trainers and maybe could be funded by the European social Fund.

The Danish model puts the person first with the main emphasis on themes such as creativity, motivation to seek new experience, personal growth and increased self confidence or education for democracy.

From a community relations perspective unless a person has motivation and self esteem he/she will be less able to deal with the problems of living in a divided society.

In Danish Folk and Day High Schools the intention is to help students to grow wiser - both about themselves and about the world. Only when individuals become their true selves can they fully enter into a living democratic human community. 🐾

*For further information on the Danish Folk Schools please contact Aidan Bunting at Omagh District Council, The Grange, Mountjoy Road, Omagh BT79 7BL. Telephone (01662) 245321*

### New Routes

The visit which led to this report on Folk High Schools was sponsored by *New Routes*, a bursary scheme jointly funded by the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust and The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, for people involved in the field of community development and social change within Northern Ireland. The aim of the scheme is to enable people active in the community, in a paid or voluntary capacity, to travel and visit projects outside of Northern Ireland to gain a wider perspective that can inform and enhance their community involvement. Each application will be judged on its merits and bursaries will be flexible to reflect the nature of the proposed programme. It is intended to assist individuals and will not cover group travel. *Further details are available from: Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, 22 Mount Charles, Belfast BT7 1NZ, telephone (01232) 245927.*

Colin Fowler

# Corrymeela begins when you leave

In the last edition of the *Journal* I gave a brief overview of how I came to be involved in this area of work and finished with a list of questions which, I must admit, always haunt my mind. This time around, I would like to tell you about some aspects of the Corrymeela Community where I currently work as a researcher and, in the past, worked as the Youth and Schools Worker.

For me, the most memorable collection of my first encounter with the Corrymeela Community was that as soon as I walked in I noticed a sign above the door saying: "Corrymeela Begins When You Leave". Now you can imagine how I felt. I hadn't even got into this place and already they were telling me to go home!!! Was this a sarcastic way of saying "clear off" or was it one of those "back-to-front" kind of riddles (that people in this field of work love so much) which was full of hidden wisdom and meaning? Thankfully, it was the latter, and on that day I learned three very valuable lessons:

1. Don't take things/people at face value.
2. Plan for the future and seek to provide experiences that can be transported back into an individual's own setting.
3. Try to say clearly what you mean!

## About Corrymeela

The Corrymeela Community (which began in 1965) is a dispersed group of approximately 170 people from the North of Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Britain and elsewhere who see their task as being:

*"People of all ages and Christian traditions who, individually and together, are committed to the healing of social, religious and political divisions that exist in Northern Ireland and throughout the world".*

The Community has two physical bases:

- ❑ A large **residential centre** outside the town of Ballycastle in Co. Antrim (which can accommodate up to 120 people).
- ❑ An **office in Belfast** which acts as a base for both fieldwork staff and administrative staff and as a "neutral" meeting space for groups.

These two centres are a resource to the Community's membership, the wider network of "Friends of Corrymeela" and, indeed, to society in general. However, the work of the Community is not solely limited to these centres. Nor is Corrymeela exclusively a "Peace Group" or a "Community Relations Agency". Thus, it is important to remember that though these two perceptions may be widely held, the Corrymeela Community is essentially a group of people from the main Christian traditions who seek to work towards a broad vision of reconciliation. This work is, therefore, as much about addressing the issues of class, sex, age, educational background, etc. as it is about Catholic/Protestant or Republican/Loyalist work.

This "wider" vision also stems from the fact that Corrymeela's origins do not lie in a "reactive movement" against any specific Northern Irish atrocity but, rather, come from a proactive movement of individuals who - in the mid-1960's - felt that there was the possibility of finding new ways to deal with conflict and division. Subsequently, the work of the Community is much more holistic in nature than purely focused community relations work; though "reconciliation work" does encompass some elements of this.

## Practice-based learning

The experience of the Community has been rooted primarily in the practical aspects of reconciliation work and, consequently, models of "good practice" have developed out of this process rather than through academic studies. During my experience of being on Corrymeela programmes (over the past 16 years or so) I have learned many valuable lessons and insights which have worked for me. I share these with you in the knowledge that they are not the only way to approach aspects of this work, but that they may act as a starting point for some people and/or as a measure to gauge the things that you don't want to do! Either option makes me happy, because I don't believe that there is one absolute path that should be followed. This work is about adopting and utilising those things which work best in specific circumstances - regardless of their source.

## The "ego trip"

However, the one thing that I have always felt is crucially important is that what we offer to people must not become an "ego trip" for ourselves i.e. it must be, fundamentally, about empowering the individual and offering to them

new opportunities and possibilities. There is always the distinct danger that the only reason we are doing something is to prove how “good” or how “professional” or how “indispensable” that we actually are. Thus, I have often found myself falling into the trap of doing the right deed for the wrong reason!!! Another possible pitfall that we might encounter is that we actually establish a situation of “dependency” - in that the people that we are working alongside cannot move forward without us and we may convince ourselves that they need us more than they actually do. Furthermore, the “new learning” that takes place must not be reliant upon a specific person, place or dogma. That is why I began this piece with the title: “Corrymeela Begins When You Leave”.

### **Preliminary acknowledgements**

□ At the core of this work is the acknowledgement that we all begin at different places. This, for me, means that there is a possible danger in trying to use “off-the-peg” packages which may be irrelevant or culturally-biased rather than trying to design programmes around specific needs of individuals or groups. For example, many people find the whole concept of group work sessions a totally alien (or often a middle-class) concept and have never had to learn basic group work skills such as listening, sharing experiences with others etc.

□ Everyone (yes, even the “we’ve-done-it-all-before” facilitator) holds certain stereotypes, images and myths about other people. I’ll give you an example: I would often visit schools and be mistaken for the delivery man; some parents would worry about whether or not I was a “suitable person” to let their children go away with; the police would pull me in for looking like a “potential terrorist”; at airports they would think I was a drugs dealer.... You get the picture? How many of you have (at whatever level) transferred similar feelings upon those that you have met? Indeed, what makes this issue all the more problematic is that for every such stereotype there is, underpinning it, a very small (often long-forgotten) grain of truth. After all, I would probably be suspicious of me!

□ There are no “goodies” or “baddies” in this work - we are all both a part of the problem and a part of the solution. Thus, we must always be careful not to scapegoat or blame some groups or individuals so that we can all feel like we are the “right” ones.

### **Preparations**

In preparing to do the work I have continually noted that the following things are important:

*Personal Preparation of Workers* - In my experience, I have rarely had any negative experiences with the participants on groups, but I have had innumerable difficulties with workers who were too frightened to address issues. Consequently, their fears and worries were transmitted to the members of the group who also wobbled a bit. Thus, I feel that it is crucial for the leaders of groups to go through any particular experience themselves before they try to encourage their group members to do this. It is also crucial to look at their hopes, fears, expectations, etc. and to identify their strengths and weaknesses in advance.

*Clarity of Purpose and Roles* - Everyone needs to know, in advance, what they are letting themselves in for and what they are expected to do.

*Motivation* - It is important to understand the particular reasons why individuals want to become involved in this type of work. Is it to understand each other better? Is it to fulfil some requirement of the job? Is it to gain information so that it is easier to “put down” other people?

*Voluntary Commitment* - Everyone should be there because they want to be there, not because they are forced to do so. Thus, they opt into these programmes and have a measure of freedom of choice.

*Opportunity To Express Hopes, Fears and Expectations* - All participants should have the right to have these aired and understood before the group continues.

*Single Identity Work* - For many groups this is important as a chance to explore and affirm their position and as an opportunity to increase their sense of confidence and pride in who and what they are (not only in their religious affiliation). This can ensure that valuable time is not spent at a later date upon intra-group arguments and/or a sense of feeling “put down”.

*Neutral Venues* - Many groups have expressed to me that it is crucial that all such experiences (at least in the tentative stages) should take place at a venue which is not identified with any specific interested party. This can add pressure to an already tense situation.

*Equal Status* - When two or more groups - from what may be seen as “opposing camps” - are to engage in an encounter it is important that they are seen to be of “equal status”. By this I mean that they have approximately the same amount of knowledge and information, have undergone a similar period of preparation, are numerically balanced, possess a similar level of group work skills ...

*Contract* - It is important that all of the participants can feel a sense of ownership of the programme and that their interests have been safe-guarded. Furthermore, it is crucial for members that some of their fears can be allayed. Forming a mutually-agreed contract can help to meet some of these concerns. This provides a structure to work within and a common set of goals to strive towards. There are always going to be some “Non-Negotiable” items on it (according to the rules of the centre that you are working within, or time restrictions that must be enforced or whatever) but by offering participants the opportunity to negotiate and reach consensus upon some elements of the contract they often feel a sense of empowerment and control. This is never an easy process. It may even be an “alien” concept to most of the group members. However, it can also be a very rewarding part of a group’s life together and a valuable opportunity to explore practical decision-making.

One obvious danger, however, is that the facilitator may try to impose his or her agenda upon the group in an attempt to find a short-cut away from possible contentious issues which may arise at a later stage. This, in one sense, treats the participants as children who are incapable of making their own decisions. Yes, it is a longer process if mistakes are made, but ultimately it may be a greater opportunity for learning about group work. This contract should always be open to being amended if, and when, the group reach a consensus about it. For many people this may be their first real chance to practice practical politics.

## First meeting

Nowadays in community relations work there may often be a core group of people who are accomplished “group

work-goers” and who “know what the crack is”. However, it is also crucial to remember that for the vast majority of participants the idea of social group work may be way outside of their experience to date. Consequently, there is always a need to help these people to claim an equal role in the proceedings and to attempt to translate theoretical principles into some more concrete or tangible form. Traditionally, many workers (consciously or unconsciously) use “icebreakers” to fulfil this task. However, no matter which method of introduction is employed, the following principles need to be addressed:

*Guarantee* - Some groups expect the facilitator to be some kind of a genie or a guru who can “make things happen”. This, of course, is totally untrue. An experienced worker can sometimes see imaginative ways to introduce ideas or to address contentious issues. However, the “power” to make things happen always lies with the individual members of the group. Subsequently, there are only a few things any worker can confidently guarantee to a group...

- ❑ If you want to enjoy yourself; meet new friends; learn something new about yourself or other people, etc. then you will.
- ❑ You will take from the experience in direct proportion to how much you contribute to it.

*Territory* - When virtually every group arrives at a programme they are very “territorial”. They may claim “their” space at the back of the bus or “their” corner of the room. They tend to see that “their side” is “different from the others” and in their nervous anxiety there is a tendency to over-exaggerate both the perceived differences and the sense of commonality with “their own”. The first task, therefore, is to show that this is not necessarily the case and that nothing can change unless everyone is prepared to take a chance and to physically move.

*Nervous Energy* - In such an atmosphere there is a lot of nervous energy and tension around. No one wishes to drop their role or to appear to be weak or stupid. Thus, something needs to be done to “burn off” this energy and to establish a sense of equality of status within the group.

*Individuality v Teamwork* - Most of us have been brought up in a system which promotes individuality, personal achievement, competition, independence, etc. However, for intimacy trust and growth to occur there needs to be a greater emphasis placed upon teamwork, interdependence, co-operation ...

*Trust* - Such work always requires an element of risk-taking. However, this is not easy for individuals unless there is a sense of trust in the group. Thus members need

to be encouraged to take “calculated risks” in an environment of trust.

*Creativity* - Often in group work sessions there is a tendency for all of us to fall back into the same old, safe rituals that we have always followed. In essence, we merely repeat the “truths” of our past experience and repeat what may have been mistakes or what may be inappropriate or irrelevant in this particular situation. There is, therefore, a need to think creatively and to be prepared to explore imaginative alternatives - in the belief that what may on the surface seem to be impossible could actually be possible!

*Dialogue* - All of us try at different times to resolve our disagreements by using violence. Sometimes this is overt physical violence. Yet more often it is via the means of verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, slander, “backstabbing”, “slagging-off”... We, as facilitators in this field, often fall into this second trap in our attempts to prove that our approach is “more right” than the others and that we are the most competent and professional workers around. Dialogue, on the other hand, implies that we try to listen to, empathise with and understand each other without letting our egos and subjectivity get in the way.

### **Walls and bridges**

If we use the analogy of “walls” and “bridges” it is easier to examine the things which divide us and the things which can bring us together. Both of these are important, for this work is not about developing a new common dogma or assimilation, but is primarily about recognising that we all share some aspects to our being in common while, at the same time, we also are different. The crux is that we need to see that difference does not automatically imply that there is never a time when any of us will be absolutely like anyone else. Acknowledging this can be a very important stage in a process of reconciliation and in reducing fears and suspicion.

Indeed, we never tend to see the faults or problems in our own community. Such things always belong to “other people”. Perhaps, this can be illustrated very clearly if we remember back to the time when the Berlin Wall was being dismantled. Right across the North of Ireland many families were tuning-in to the news to witness this event. Indeed, I would hazard a guess that many of them were also saying things such as: “Isn’t great for them un’s. After all this time their country is getting back to normal. Sure it wasn’t natural having that big wall running right up the middle of the streets...” Now, if any of those same people had only looked out of their back window they might have been able to witness the same phenomenon in their own street!!!

### **Method of working**

A piece of research that I was recently carrying out led to some very interesting outcomes. When I asked a group of young adults (who had been involved in reconciliation/community relations work for an number of years) the question: “What is important to you about this type of experience?” their responses proved to be interesting reading. They listed things such as: freedom to say what you wish, a sense of trust, group intimacy, having a place and a role, feeling that your views are respected, increasing self-confidence, etc. as being of crucial importance. I repeated this study with many different age groups and with people from all backgrounds who had been involved with both Corrymeela’s programmes and those of other groups. Yet the responses seemed to remain, by and large, the same.

This proved to be a massive dent to my ego! After all, I am a qualified Youth and Community Worker; I’ve been working face-to-face in this field for almost 15 years; I have been on many in-service training courses ... I had, in fact, convinced myself that all these people flocked to my programmes because the content was so exciting and because I was such a wonderful facilitator. But obviously that is not the case. Yet, if I’d have used a wee bit of common sense I would probably have been able to work this all out for myself.

Consequently, this helped me to change my model of working and to see an new way of approaching this. It would appear that for many people:

*In this first instance, the ENVIRONMENT/CONTEXT is more important that the actual programme that is being offered and the programme acts as the reason of focus for being together. However, over time, the CONTENT becomes increasingly more important (as a group members fulfil their primary needs) and the context decreases in significance.*

This relates directly to what Abraham Maslow referred to as a “Hierarchy of Needs”. He indicated that human beings have a wide range of needs in their life. These range from very “basic” ones (essential for the very maintenance of life itself) to “higher” ones (which refer to personal fulfilment). In my work parallels with this model can be drawn. Thus, it may be more appropriate to discover what a person’s “basic needs” are (e.g. love, sense of security, to increase self-esteem, etc.) before we move into “higher” ones. It would seem to make sense that someone who is being physically abused at home is not really easy to enter into discussion about consociational governmental structures in Northern Ireland! Put simply, it is important to see this type of work from an holistic angle and not

merely to tamper (in an “Elastoplast” fashion) with specific symptoms of a deeper-rooted problem. This is also a long-term process and, to my mind, there is no one group or organisation that can meet all the needs of everyone. Herein, it is possible to see how we can help and support each other. Our work is complementary. It should never be about trying to hold the “absolute truth” and “the salmon of all knowledge”. This does not exist. Every group and every individual is different and has both a different set of needs and a different departure point for meeting these.

Indeed, it is also important that we do not fool ourselves into believing that we have found the “true way” by engaging in empty academic exercises without fully grasping the enormous complexity of the human condition. I suppose this has to do with following the “letter of the law” rather than the “spirit of the law”. I’ll give you an

example... I know of a few people who claim that they live a “politically correct” life-style. Not so long ago I was walking along a street with them and noticed that a grating cover had been lifted. Fearing that one of them would fall into the hole I shouted: “Look out for the Man-Hole!” Now within seconds I was told off for daring to call this item a “Man-Hole” by one of the males in the group. Why couldn’t I have called it a “Person-Hole?” he asked. However, three weeks later that same man’s partner left him because he was physically abusing her!!!

Now, I tell you that story not to demean people who are genuinely trying to seek a non-sexist language, but rather to show how sometimes we don’t really understand our words and actions. Therefore, we need to try to be congruent people - i.e. people whose words and actions are ultimately the same. More importantly, we need to recognise that a lot of the work will begin when we leave.



*Joe Hinds and Brendan McAllister (Please note this article was written before the current ceasefires)*

## The role of peace and reconciliation groups in Northern Ireland

At the last count there were over 100 organisations in Ireland (mainly in Northern Ireland), dedicating themselves in some way to peace, reconciliation or community relations work. As a direct result of the conflict in Northern Ireland, a great wealth of indigenous community responses have developed engaging many significant issues, particular sectors or groups of people and involving different practices and approaches to conflict resolution. Given its relatively small size in terms of population and territory, it’s hard to imagine another region of conflict which has generated such a dynamic response.

Despite the numerous attempts at local conflict resolution over the years by this body of practitioners, little effort has been made to define and assess conflict resolution work in a systematic manner. There are a number of practical explanations for this which might have a resonance with other conflict regions. Most practitioners in the field would accept that because the work tends to be activity centred, labour intensive and under-resourced, especially as regards personnel, to take time out for strategic planning or long term reflection is considered a luxury which few can afford. Additionally, practitioners may be so closely involved in the work that they have difficulty finding the appropriate broad perspective from which to indulge in such evaluation and planning.

If it is generally accepted that groups have not had the capacity to analyse their own work, there have been even fewer opportunities for practitioners to comment on the work involving the entire region.

The typology developed by Mari Fitzduff was the first serious attempt to define and categorize conflict resolution work in Northern Ireland. It is generally agreed that this pioneering effort has had a significant impact on practitioners in Ireland and indeed further afield. Without going into the typology in any depth it is important to note two significant points. First, Fitzduff’s work helped to take the competitive element out of the different approaches and interpretations of community relations/conflict resolution work and it helped introduce a notion of complementarity. This has allowed groups to respect each others methods and areas of work, to recognise that

different approaches are legitimate and that perhaps a single approach to conflict resolution in Northern Ireland maybe too simplistic to make any real sense.

The second significant point relating to Fitzduff's typology was its capacity to alert the peace and reconciliation groups to the notion that other forces, structures and initiatives outside purist conflict resolution practice were needed to bring about the prospect of a regional peace settlement. These included community development, economic regeneration, the adoption of pluralist environments, the development of trusted and accessible security forces, and so on.

What this paper will attempt to do will suggest a different categorization, thematic in nature and based on the actual activities of peace and reconciliation groups in Northern Ireland and considers the impact of the various categories on inter-communal relations. The paper also observes the strengths and weaknesses in the four different approaches and suggests what part they play in the transformation to a more peaceful and just society.

The characterization is probably more like a caricature and is not intended to be dogmatic, merely useful to glimpse some further understanding of peace or community relations activities and further, to instil a spirit of critical thinking and debate among those who organise such activities. The second part of the paper intends to sketch some key issues of current concern which need to be addressed if peace and reconciliation groups are to play a more significant role in the future development of a peace process.

## Categories

Brendan McAllister's contemporary analysis identifies four main groups: the "Confronters" who believe in taking the war to the terrorists and endeavour to embarrass them out of their behaviour; the "Big Bang Theorists" who believe that if enough people can be mobilized in a significant action, the violence will have to stop; the "Prayers" who believe, primarily, in bringing it all to God, without whose intervention all attempts at peace building will be limited; and the "Relaters" who believe in the importance of building relationships across the community so that trusting networks can be established as a foundation for lasting peace.

## Confronters

Confronters are characterized by their highlighting of particular paramilitary activities; these can be punishment

shootings, punishment beatings and exclusion from communities as well as bombing campaigns and killings. Confronters are a comparatively recent phenomenon among the peace movement and have tended to specialize in particular themes or issues. For example, the Peace Train Organisation was formed as a result of a concerted IRA bombing campaign to disrupt the main Belfast to Dublin railway. Families Against Intimidation and Terror was formed by families of victims who suffered punishment shootings at the hands of paramilitary organisations because of alleged deviant behaviour.

Despite their lack of numbers those engaged in this type of work are extremely active and committed and undertake considerable risk in tackling paramilitary abuses in such a direct and public manner. Confronters tend to organise public campaigns, harness the attention of the media and attempt to embarrass paramilitary organisations out of their particular violent behaviour. For many years, groups like the Committee on the Administration of Justice have monitored the performance of the judicial system, the security forces and emergency legislation in relation to international standards of human rights but no such systematic monitoring was ever made of paramilitary activity. Confronters therefore, have a very important role to play in highlighting human rights abuses conducted by paramilitary organisations.

Confronters have a definite place within the "peace mosaic", they are concerned about issues of justice and basic human rights, they address those elements in society committing acts of violence and bring the full horror and hurt inflicted upon victims to a wider audience. Confronters play a useful role in shaking a community from comfortable indifference or apathy in case society becomes accustomed to an acceptable level of violence.

Groups that confront tend not to talk to paramilitaries for fear of giving some sort of legitimacy to their philosophy or actions. On the contrary, paramilitaries are viewed as illegitimate groups with no community mandate. There is no need therefore to exercise forms of mediation or conflict resolution between warring parties, in many ways confronters are declaring their own war, a propaganda war against paramilitary organisations.

The activities generated by Confronters can challenge the notion of community support for campaigns or acts of violence, they can question the use of political violence and expose the inconsistencies and contradictions of those engaged in

violence for political ends. For example, the Peace Train Organisation successfully highlighted the contradiction of a republican paramilitary group fighting for some form of United Ireland, demolishing the only tangible rail link between North and South. Families Against Intimidation and Terror successfully exposed the hypocrisy of organisations who are fighting for some form of justice but who continually dispense summary and barbaric punishments within the communities they purport to defend and protect.

Another strength inherent in the activities of such groups, many of whom are victims or families of victims of paramilitary violence, is the encouragement it provides for victims to speak out and to become involved in a variety of practical ways.

In some instances local communities have mobilized in response to paramilitary shootings. In 1990 a local community, Cooley, Co Louth united in their revulsion of the killing of a local man by the Provisional IRA. The local man was shot and killed because an arms dump was discovered by the Police on his farm, the implication being that he informed the Police of its presence. The community demonstrated their disgust at this action by mass demonstrations, by reprinting posters of the dead man which were then displayed all over the locality and by isolating those within the community that were known to have strong republican connections.

When communities begin to resist and counter the influence of paramilitary organisations in a concerted way the control exercised by such groups over communities is seriously diminished, but further examples of communities reacting in this way to paramilitary organisations who have a degree of credibility and control within the community are few and far between.

Undoubtedly confronters are right to suggest that a portion of paramilitary activity is about intimidation, control and the promotion of fear, but, to brand all paramilitary activity in this way is not useful. In fact, the more paramilitaries are portrayed as being sub-human, parasites, immoral and illegitimate, the harder it will be to understand and finally come to terms with this phenomenon in our society.

Paramilitary groups grow out of intense political and social conflict, their members come from within communities who can constantly legitimize their presence and support their actions. There are examples in recent history when paramilitary groups have mobilized massive emotional and political support - the 1981 hunger strikes mobilized hundreds of thousands of nationalists to the campaign for political status for paramilitary prisoners, resulting in the election of Sinn Fein candidates to Westminster and initiated the electoral success of republicans in local elections which has remained constant to the present day. The Ulster Workers' strike of 1974 saw paramilitary organisations playing a key role in bringing down the Power Sharing Executive and it was evident that paramilitary activity and intimidation received large scale public support from the loyalist community.

Surveys have revealed that in general, paramilitaries in Northern Ireland are not very different in personality, background or intelligence to other people. The image of "thugs" or "monsters" committing mindless acts of violence has not been borne out by the evidence available.

In many respects the confronter's analysis is too simplistic and convenient and denies other forces that have helped to shape the emergence of paramilitary groups - social conditions, community alienation, security force harassment, political philosophy and the need for

community protection. The physical force of tradition in both mainstream republican and loyalist political philosophies is strong and deeply rooted in our culture and it will remain there for many years to come. By demonizing members of illegal organisations we conveniently isolate them from our minds so perhaps we do not have to take responsibility for their actions. So how far do such tactics, public embarrassment and counter propaganda prove effective in decreasing the levels of violent behaviour? More importantly, do such tactics or approaches make it easier or harder for paramilitary groups to stop. Perhaps the louder we shout at such people the harder it will be to talk to them at some stage in the future.

### **Big Bang Theorists**

Big Bang Theorists are characterized by large demonstrations, marching for peace and usually condemning those engaged in violence and sometimes politicians for failing to arrive at some agreed solution to the conflict. Invariably these demonstrations are organised in the wake of a notorious atrocity and thrive on the emotional fallout from these events. This approach argues that if enough people can be mobilized in a significant action the violence will have to stop. Many people will remember the early demonstrations of the Peace People which engaged thousands of individuals from both traditions and which created such an optimism for the peaceful resolution of the "troubles". Last year Peace '93 mobilized thousands of people, particularly in the Republic of Ireland, in the wake of the Warrington bombing which claimed the lives of two small boys. Lurgan Inter-Friendship was formed after a series of sectarian killings in the locality and their activities were characterized by large scale local demonstrations demanding an end to political violence.

One of the strengths of this approach is its capacity to engage and involve a lot of people from all parts of society. It can and does muster substantial cross-community support

and involvement and the activities and actions generate powerful sentiments and expressions for peace. One of the achievements of this approach has been its capacity to provide a traditionally divided community with something to unite about in an intensely public and physical way.

The sheer weight of numbers engaged in demonstrations serve to demonstrate the community's desire for peace and puts distance between those engaged in violence and the communities from which they come. A further useful factor of the activities of the Big Bang Theorists lies in the profile of the demonstrations which raises the general awareness in peace or community relations work, and, for many individuals attendance at such gatherings can be the beginning of a more focused commitment to work for peace in their home, workplace, church or professions. The activities of the Big Bang Theorists can be a formative influence on those who attend such activities and inspire people to become involved in more mainstream community relations work.

These periodic public expressions of disgust at inter-communal violence and desire for a peaceful co-existence can to a degree, shake public apathy and hopelessness. On many occasions these public expressions have provided a channel for ordinary people to do something positive however small. Their activities can be an antidote to hopelessness, it can raise moral, particularly, in difficult times of heightened sectarian tension.

Such gatherings can put pressure, however temporary, on paramilitaries and politicians and community leaders to react to the essential demands of an end to violence and the engagement in "talks" to resolve the constitutional impasse.

Essentially, these messages are the lowest common denominator around which the two communities can agree. Thereafter, there appear considerable differences on how to achieve a peaceful settlement and what the actual terms of the peace settlement should entail. Over the years the public demonstrations have not mobilized enough opinion which encourages political leaders to compromise or to adopt more consensual type processes which might allow accommodation to materialize.

In one sense the involvement such demonstrations allow participants is of a one off and superficial nature. Emotions can quickly fade as the latest atrocity becomes yet another in a long list of tragic events and statistics. John Dunlop, the former moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland argues that you cannot build peace on the last atrocity.

Traditionally it has been impossible to sustain mass movements for peace and as the numbers attending or

responding to the call for yet another public demonstration gradually reduce, groups are forced to address the issue of how to sustain the momentum and translate emotion into energy and practical activities. The experience of groups caught up in this dilemma of translating emotion and enthusiasm into practical energy and long term involvement in conflict resolution or community relations work suggests that this is extremely difficult.

Big Bang Theorists aspire to the notion that the failure to arrive at an end to the violence and political conflict is someone else's fault - usually paramilitaries and elected representatives. Their attention, if not blame, is clearly focused on someone else's shoulders. It seems to be difficult to channel such events into more practical steps of action. Action, which allows society in its different structures and groupings to construct ways to be more deeply engaged in community relations work. It does not suggest that responsibility for the conflict lies on everyone's shoulders.

Historically speaking, electoral support for politicians and political parties has remained constantly high despite the public desire for leaders to engage in a peace process. Paramilitary support might suffer some short term damage from the public abhorrence at particular actions or atrocities, but they have enough hard core support to overcome such short term set backs.

## Prayers

Prayers are characterized by their organised times of prayer, fasts, walks and special services drawing people together from both sides of the divide. They are ultimately concerned with the spiritual dimension which has an impact on all peacemaking activity. God will primarily be the main agent in healing community divisions.

Many commentators on the Northern Ireland conflict have expressed surprise that not more peace and reconciliation work is being undertaken by the churches themselves. They envisage the Christian outlook as being naturally disposed to this work. The New Testament, they argue provides ample case studies of Christian witness to reconciliation work.

This Christian perspective has brought many individuals and groups into the peace and reconciliation spectrum, producing many initiatives over a period of years, some predating the current spate of conflict. Many of the Prayers see themselves following in Christ's footsteps, the role of the reconciler is a natural one for them to adopt. Many clergy and committed lay people have been drawn into community relations and conflict resolution through this experience and their presence permeates through into other categories of community relations work.

The broad range of interdenominational communities that have established themselves - Christian Renewal Centre in Rostrevor, the Currach Community, the Columbanus Community, the Solas Community and the Cornerstone Community all in North Belfast, Corrymeela, and Columba House in Derry, for example, see themselves as beacons of hope, their symbolic example of co-existence, illuminating a stark, sectarian landscape.

These groups also bring to bear a moral imperative, a strength of conviction and commitment to reconciliation work which can be reinforced and sustained by religious faith. Their religious convictions ensure that they redress other inequities and social evils and much of their work is not confined to a Protestant/Catholic interface, many like Corrymeela and the Columbanus Community have developed a holistic approach to the theme of reconciliation.

To work for a spiritual as well as a social and political renewal involving Protestants and Catholics strikes a strong cord with many people in Northern Ireland. But to imply that the heart of our problem is a lack of faith, or the presence of Evil and what must be experienced to overcome these intractable problems is a spiritual conversion, alienates many others.

The ecumenical vision, while attractive to some, is something to be wary of for the majority of the church going population in Northern Ireland. Ecumenists in a Northern Ireland context paint a vision of ultimate unity between denominations and it is this vision which can limit their appeal. Unity implies a fusion and loss of identity, of separateness, collusion and compromise. In a conflict where the mainstream churches are part of the conflict and assist in sustaining the battlelines of separation and segregation, ecumenists are a distinctive minority and many interdenominational groups operate outside the established church structures because they blur the edges of denominational identity. It is ironic that the work of such interdenominational groups inspired by the Christian

message of reconciliation is marginalised in the very constituency where you might imagine they would be most effective.

For Prayers to become more effective they need to be involved and accepted as part of mainstream church structures and not operate outside them. Recent developments suggest that established groups may not have the credibility to reach more mainstream, evangelical or fundamentalist audiences and that groups from within those constituencies with sound theological credentials are the ones which will develop the debate and discussion in a single identity context (e.g. ECONI, Scripture Union Northern Ireland).

### **Relaters**

Relaters are characterized by long term peace activists. They work at all levels of society, bringing people from different traditions together. Relaters try to improve communication, dispel stereotypes, reduce prejudice and build relationships. Relaters accept the divided nature of Northern Ireland society which in many cases prevents any quality contact between conflicting communities. In fact, the communities have successfully created ways to ensure that they do not have many natural channels through which they can communicate. Areas of territory, political and denominational allegiance, educational systems, social and leisure patterns, sporting activities, cultural festivities and divided workforces have all successfully combined to minimize substantial contact and segregation is the norm.

Relaters therefore see their role as providing safe opportunities for conflicting groups or communities to exchange information, to have sustained contact with each other in order to achieve a mutual understanding. For relaters, only through contact will fear, suspicion, misinformation and prejudice be countered. Over the years relaters have developed many approaches or models, some indigenous and some imported, which allow for a meaningful communication process to develop.

Many relater groups are in the "contact business"; they range from holiday schemes to a variety of destinations some exotic, some local, which entail a minimum amount of contact and conflict resolution process to highly structured and intense programmes which follow a prescribed and rigid model of conflict resolution. A definite contribution to improving inter-community relationships by the relaters has been the development of many methods and models, experientially tested, in conflict resolution.

Apart from the development of techniques to handle inter-group conflict and communication, relaters have also created neutral venues or space where individuals and

groups feel secure to openly address issues of division. In a landscape where few natural venues exist, these spaces are essential to stimulate and sustain communication between distant communities. Much of the practice of reconciliation work occurs in safe centres away from the sharp interface areas and although this is a natural response to the lack of such space on the ground and particularly relevant in areas which experience the greatest degree of tension, there is a danger that people presume that community relations work can only take place in far off centres away from the harsh reality of everyday sectarian existence. It may be equally important to develop ways which ensure that community relations work is sustained within communities despite the lack of neutral spaces for inter community gatherings.

Some relaters can also feel that they can have dialogue with all protagonists without precondition, including paramilitaries. This ability to talk to all parties can give them an aura of neutrality and credibility, a rare commodity in Northern Ireland.

One of the drawbacks of the relationship approach is that it suggests no quick fix solutions. This type of peace building is "the long haul", relaters are working towards the generational, and not immediate change. Although this is perhaps realistic, and there is a great deal of academic and scientific evidence to back this up, it is also demoralizing for communities forced with a continuing recipe of ongoing sectarian strife.

Many of the participants effected by the relater's processes are involved as individuals or belong to small sub-groups within communities. Many relaters focus on the development of individual friendships and relationships and over the years there has been a consistent lack of engagement in bringing strategic groups or institutions within the traditional blocs together. Perhaps until such strategic work is developed the relationship approach may take even longer to take full effect. While it is necessary and desirable for work to occur between individual participants of groups, say, for instance pupils from Protestant and Catholic schools, relaters need to develop simultaneous programmes which effect the schools as institutions. Schools which develop a more accommodating

and inclusive ethos will be better support structures within which the individuals can develop a greater sense of cultural diversity.

Sometimes the variety of models and methods on display create a competitive environment in which practitioners protest that their methods are superior to others. Further, the terminology or jargon evolving can sometimes create confusion and erect a barrier between the relater and the community with whom he or she is trying to engage. It is a general experience in Northern Ireland that the further the terminology and the processes are removed from the natural cultural context, the less relevant and effective the processes will be in practice. In many areas the terms peace, reconciliation, community relations, prejudice reduction or conflict resolution will not be appropriate. Some relater groups from the early seventies have evolved particular contact scenarios involving young people and children especially. In some cases what has developed are programmes which are practised on participants where the model engineers attitudinal change and in effect where the relater groups work on communities and not with them.

The relationship with the participant groups suggests that the fault for inter-communal strife and intolerance is their's and that the relater can do something to the community in order to make it right or acquire a true perspective, free from prejudice. In my experience very few programmes actually empower communities to continue and sustain the work within their own segregated environments.

### **Empowerment**

It may be useful to concentrate on a number of themes which would be significant if peace and reconciliation groups are to play a more significant role in the development of a future peace process.

I suspect that too many reconciliation groups still see themselves as interveners in a problem of which they are not a part. An attitude of working with the unenlightened in order to educate them has significant ramifications in the relationships they develop with their client groups and will undoubtedly limit the effectiveness of their work. A recent conference of Protestant and Catholic community groups living on both sides of the peace lines in Belfast openly questioned the relevance and credibility of peace and reconciliation groups.

A new phase of the work of peace and reconciliation groups should therefore involve empowering communities to realise their own potential, to realise what they should or could be doing in their own local context. Groups should act as catalyst, facilitator, and empowerer of skills, methods and strategies. Groups are well placed to act as a

resource but at some stage allow communities to do their own community relations work. For many groups this will require a radical rethink of their activities and their methods.

### **New Constituencies**

A further significant issue which has been long identified by observers of the peace movement is that it engages with those who want to be engaged. The audiences or client groups are in some way self selecting and while it is important to support those who feel comfortable to become part of this work, it is essential that groups place some energy into developing and targeting new audiences and constituencies. The vast majority of public, voluntary and private institutions in Northern Ireland are not involved in mainstream community relations work, and while there has been significant progress in drawing many organisations to address sectarianism, there are vast tracks of territory as yet uncharted and unexplored. In many ways peace and reconciliation groups have the competence and experience necessary to address this work but whether they have the capacity, appetite and awareness to respond to this challenge is as yet undecided.

### **Extremists**

If the latest developments in the peace process are contemplating scenarios which allow for the participation of Sinn Fein, what signal does that send to the peace and reconciliation sector? In practice the movement has been selective with whom it deals and sometimes its language and approach has marginalized its perceived relevance to certain communities. Discreet mediation between paramilitaries and political parties has occurred but mainly through individual figures. But if in Northern Ireland we are now able to contemplate scenarios of inclusiveness, who will be best placed to work with the extreme elements that are being enticed in from the cold. Many of the activities of Confronters and Big Bang Theorists will not be relevant in a new era of an evolving political peace process.

Extremists can also be represented by marginalized groups within society and this theme cannot necessarily be confined to those groups who have engaged in some sort of military struggle for political ends. There are political, social and theological extremes in Northern Ireland many of whom are intertwined and linked. By disengaging from one, groups may also be distancing themselves from other marginalized areas and groups. The challenge for the peace and reconciliation sector will be to develop more creative responses and ways in which they can engage with the marginalized and alienated of our society.

The challenge to groups who have been working towards peace in Northern Ireland will be to review their work in the light of critical analysis and changing political landscapes if they are to be a relevant and realistic force for positive change. 🏠

# Rainbows and religion-

## The role of different methods of thought in theology, religion and conflict

*Peter McLachlan presented the following paper at the international conference on Religion and Conflict which took place in Armagh in May 1994, organised by the Centre for the Study of Conflict with Armagh Together.*

*Although the political context referred to in this paper has changed, the illustrations given remain apposite.*

### The problem outlined

Some years ago I was in the centre of Stuttgart as the sun was setting over the lake there which has at one end a magnificent fountain leaping into the sky. As I walked around the lake I came to a tongue of land jutting into the lake and the path branched to offer a possibility of following the shore; this took me round a curve which brought me face to face with the fountain at a distance; suddenly I could see a magnificent rainbow in the fountain spray. Two steps more it was gone. Two steps back and it was there again. Two steps further back it was gone again. I lingered and watched others share the sudden revelation, knowing that only those who had chosen this path would have this particular experience. And so I mused: here is a possible source of conflict. Those who walk this path would have a rainbow in the fountain spray as part of their map of this cosmos; those who stick to the main path would only see the world of white spray and blue sky. If the truth of the rainbow were contested, who would have more of the truth?

Imagine for a moment that rainbow-enlightened people, as we might call them, took the argument a stage further and constructed a religion based around the symbolism of a rainbow as the fundamental principle of the cosmos, each colour and shade of thought having equal validity. And suppose that those who have had not shared in the rainbow enlightenment remained true to their belief in a more monochrome world in which their view was the only true vision. The rainbow people might soon be dubbed heretics.

And then a dispute over use of the water in the lake or ownership of the land might break out and very quickly the beliefs of the two groups would be ranged against each other in the argument about resources or power. Even if the economic and political problem were later close to being resolved by an agreement, politicians who were opponents of

reconciliation would be able to use the truth or falsehood of rainbow arguments to keep the dispute going.

“Why do religions behave so vilely?” asked the Right Reverend Kenneth Cragg, Honorary Assistant Bishop, Diocese of Oxford, in a recent article in the *Independent*:

*“aligning with other factors to work up enmity, or quite failing to discipline and reverse those instincts of evil which run counter to their supposed ethic.”*

He went on to cite the Hindus and Sikhs in India, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics and Muslims in former Yugoslavia, Roman Catholics and Muslims in Timor. One could add to this list the Armenian Christians and Muslims in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Eastern Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Cyprus, the Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka, the Jews and Muslims in Israel, the Christians and Muslims in Beirut and the Presbyterians and Roman Catholics here in Northern Ireland. There appears to be a terrifying truth as one looks around the world, that the conflicts which seem most intractable and which produce the most violence are those in which religion plays a binding role.

This paper is an attempt to sketch out some areas where it might be argued there is a need for research in order to deepen our understanding of how religions operate in the way so graphically described by Kenneth Cragg.

In another recent article in the *Independent*, John Wilson, tutor at the Department of Education Studies at Oxford, writes:

*“Our problem is at root a failure to see religion as a form of thought in its own right. Educating pupils in religion is on a par with educating them in science, history or mathematics. We do not just tell them the right answers, nor do we teach them that different people have different answers that are all more or less equal in value. What we do is to show them how to make up their minds, in the light of some kind of reason or understanding, about what is true or right in science or history or whatever. We show them.... how to make sensible choices in religion.... how to perform well in the form of thought and life we call religion”.*

All harmless enough one might say. It is certainly not the case that theological difference is in itself intrinsically bad, let alone conducive to violence. Indeed from the days of Plato and Aristotle continuing through Hegel and Marx to the present day, philosophers have argued the value of a dialectic between two positions as a necessary step in progressing towards the truth.

But yet a quick glance back at the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition gives a stark reminder that somewhere in religion there lurks a mightily destructive potential.

In what follows I propose to look at some of the differences which can be established between the two major religious traditions in Ireland as the beginnings of a case study of how difference might be exploited for its potential to enhance political enmity and exacerbate proclivity to violence. It would be my contention that in greater or lesser degree the same kind of analysis could be made in other conflicts in the world where religion plays a significant role in binding communities apart.

Some twenty years ago I first became interested in this area of study as the result of listening to a dialogue between a Jew and a Muslim identifying a series of fascinating differences which deeply affected the Israel Palestine conflict and made communication between Jews and Arabs very difficult.

In broad terms the differences they outlined produced difficulty on at least four fronts: misunderstanding about social behaviours; structural differences in society; critical variations in feelings about events and experiences in the life of the community; and differences in thinking patterns which in turn obstructed meaningful communication (the latter being especially damaging to a peace process).

All these types of differences can, I believe, be manipulated by those seeking a political power base in society.

Consciously or unconsciously politicians use language linked to their own religious system to strengthen their position. Using religion in this way is possibly the first step on the road to abandoning democratic debate and courts the possibility of violent conflict, since it involves encasing the political view in a wrapping which it is extremely difficult to challenge in rational argument.

I recall hearing a leading proponent of one particular party in Derry saying he could never actually engage in political business with a leading proponent of another political party because the latter had on one or more occasions attacked his religion. It is one thing attacking a political view; quite another attacking a religious viewpoint.

I turn to look at each of the four areas of difference mentioned earlier using examples of difference between Presbyterian, Anglican, and Roman Catholic thought and practice in Northern Ireland to illustrate the type of situation which may lead to misunderstanding, emotional isolation or political manipulation.

### **Religious behaviour**

First an example of religious behaviour: In a television interview some time ago Bishop Edward Daly drew attention to a difference between the theological import of funerals in the traditions of Ireland's two resident communities. The same point was taken up in *Burying our dead: Political Funerals in Northern Ireland* by the Interchurch Group on Faith and Politics.

To quote from an extract based on this pamphlet published recently in the journal of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council:

*“One of the main areas of misunderstanding for us in Ireland is the different emphasis that our traditions put on funerals. In traditional Catholic theology, a funeral is a time to plead for mercy and to pray for the dead person, and therefore the celebration of a funeral mass in no way suggests approval for the actions of the deceased.*

*In Protestant practice, a funeral service is, in significant part, an act of thanksgiving for the person's life. Protestants as a result are scandalised by paramilitary funerals seeing them as a statement of ecclesiastical approval for paramilitary action”.*

Bishop Edward Daly was again the main player in a very interesting funeral drama in his Cathedral. Two paramilitary men had been killed. The men's associates wanted a funeral with some paramilitary trappings in the Cathedral. The Bishop went on the record refusing permission. The

coffins complete with trappings were brought to the Cathedral for a Mass. When the coffins were finally forced into the building, the bearers found that a General Mass for the Dead had been started two minutes earlier. There was no Mass for the two dead men.

The Bishop had kept his word. But the Protestant papers next day said the Bishop had given in! The importance of this misunderstanding will not be lost on Northern Ireland people.

These I believe are only two examples out of one of a considerable number of areas of religious behaviour which need to be examined in great detail to understand how this type of misunderstanding can arise. Other areas for study include birth, marriage, prayer, pastoral care, death, bereavement, illness and church government procedures.

### Structural difference

To turn a second area which I call "structural difference". In a *Thought for the Day* on BBC Radio Ulster in June 1988 the former Presbyterian Moderator Dr John Dunlop described the annual meeting to the Presbyterian General Assembly in the following terms:

*"If you want to understand the Protestant community in Northern Ireland it is necessary to understand something of Presbyterian... and anyone who would try to construct possible political solutions to our complex problems needs to pay attention to its influence. Elders and ministers, or to use the terminology of another tradition, lay people and clergy, will be balanced in equal numbers. The business of the week will be carried on for the most part in public. The doors will be open to anybody to come and observe what is going on. The General Assembly is the highest legislative body for the church. The essence of it is participation by the people in the decision making process. In the absence of bishops and three line whips, and with Presbyterian aversion to the arrogance of strong natural leaders, no one at this stage can predict what decision may be taken. The Moderator has no executive authority being the one who chairs the discussion".*

Contrast this with structure and process in the Roman Catholic Church. Instead of the Presbyterian equalitarian power exercised by the laity and clergy as equals in Church session, Presbytery and General Assembly, there is a top down hierarchical authority vested in archbishops, bishops, priests, curates and laity. Major church business is not conducted in open session and opportunity for lay participation is strictly limited. Catholic Bishops serve for many years, Presbyterian Moderators for only one year.

Another significant difference is that in the Protestant churches when there is a difference of theological emphasis there is a strong tendency for schism to take place and a completely new church to be founded. Parallel differences in Catholicism tend to be accommodated in the Orders within the broad confines of the Roman Catholic Church.

If one looks carefully at the main parties in Northern Ireland one can see clear echoes of the church structures. For example successive leaders of the Official Unionist Party in the 1970s were ousted as soon as they went beyond the role of moderator and tried to give positive policy leadership. The present Official Unionist leader has probably survived so long because of his great moderatorial skills.

By contrast the Moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church has maintained his political position by using the other classic function of a Presbyterian moderator, that of prophetic leadership. He makes skilful use of prophetic rallies.

By contrast the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party appears to act with much more personal

authority. His recent dialogue with Sinn Fein, although exciting some opposition from within the ranks of his party, has not led to his dismissal. A Unionist leader attempting to do something of equal political novelty would not last long I suspect.

The main point I want to draw out from these structural contrasts are that the political structures to an extent mirror church structures and that they dictate that those who operate in them come with different authority roles and have unrealisable expectations of delivery from their political opponents. John Hume may want to sit down in private and do a deal with a Unionist leader.

This cannot happen because the unionist structures do not produce an equivalent figure. Instead the unionist community is represented by the equivalent of a large number of political elders who must be party to any agreement, if it is to succeed, and who must as far as possible operate in a public forum. The failure to involve these political elders in the Anglo-Irish Agreement was one factor which spelt its death knell.

### Expression of emotions

Moving on to the third type of difference between religions which merits study, we come to the handling of feelings and emotions. It is often remarked that Catholicism is a more outwardly expressive religion. The contrast between the Sistine Chapel and the Presbyterian Meeting House or indeed between the two Cathedrals in Armagh does not need stressing.

What may not be so obvious is the critical difference in the way the emotions of guilt or anger are carried in the Catholic and Calvinistic tradition. In Roman Catholicism confession allows, as it were, a safety valve for the expression and acknowledgement of a range of bad feelings. This outlet is not so readily available to the Protestant who if he is nurtured in anything approaching deterministic theology may feel it right to suppress or internalise powerful emotions or at best suffer them in silence.

In discussion with Jerry Tyrrell who works with the Quaker Peace Education Project in Northern Ireland I was interested to learn that he has found difficulty in persuading Protestants to speak out about their feelings. This echoes other evidence that Protestant young people may be less easy to involve in role play and drama than their Catholic counterparts. Certainly during two years when I was interviewing young people about their activities and interests for a weekly radio programme I found it strikingly easier to get Catholics to engage in *public* conversation than Protestants.

There may be an interesting consequence for the whole community arising out of this difference. Looking back over the waves of political emotion which have hit Northern

Ireland in the past 25 years, it is noticeable that whereas the Catholic community has reacted strongly and swiftly to events such as hunger strike deaths or peace marches, Protestants have been much slower and indeed there is a kind of incubation period like a period of repressed feeling between, say, the proroguing of the Stormont Parliament in 1972 and the Workers Council Strike in 1974 or the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1986 and the violent rally in Belfast in 1987.

The most important point of this analysis if it stands up to scrutiny is that if there appears to be little reaction in the early days after a political event which affects Protestants adversely, watch out for quite some time afterwards! At least when Catholics are similarly disaffected you will know the worst pretty quickly!

### Ways of thinking

Finally then a consideration of what may be by far the most important difference inherited from our religious upbringing - the form of our thinking. It is often held to be threatening to examine one's own epistemology or system of handling knowledge but this should not be so. There are many different ways of thinking in the world as contact with the cultures of Islam and China quickly confirms.

Here in Ireland we inherit the schism which led to the Reformation in a particularly acute form. That schism developed because of the rise of the scientific or inductive method of thinking and the application of this method to the Bible and theology. Consequently Protestants tend to examine their experience carefully and critically before moving *a posteriori* to the development of general principles in doctrines and creeds.

Catholics on the other hand operate more deductively, starting with a range of *a priori* principles from which by careful deductive thought the world is described and understood.

Paul Avis in his study of the Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission's Final Report of 1982 entitled "Ecumenical Theology" (SPCK, ISBN 0-281-64185-7) describes these two views in slightly different language but with essentially the same meaning.

He writes of the Roman Catholic view of truth as propositional. "The propositional view pays lip service - as all Christian theology is compelled to do - to ineffable nature of the divine mystery.... But in spite of such disclaimers this approach assumes that truth is reducible to propositions.... It understands faith to be.... believing what has been divinely revealed or authoritatively taught."

Anglican thought he describes as personalist. "*The personal approach conceives of truth as an apprehension of reality....*"

*Doctrines are in the final analysis verbal crystallization of a common experience. As far as the personalist is concerned we are inescapable immersed in error; it is the condition of our being. Our best insights are simply the least misleading ones”.*

The communication problems which flow from this difference of thought form - a difference which of course derives from Plato and Aristotle as well as from pre and post Reformation theology - are not far to seek.

There are abroad in the community of Ireland *a priori* propositions which are sometimes given an almost theological status. Examples would be “Ireland is one and indivisible politically” and “people on this island have a distinct political identity which is Irish and which distinguishes them from the British” and “the problems of Ireland will not be solved until the British leave”.

Equally there are abroad verbal crystallization which have followed careful distilling of experience. Examples might be: democracy works through the rule of the majority; people in the Republic of Ireland do not understand northern unionists; Protestants would have no place in a United Ireland.

The truth and currency of such statements - and there are of course many more - is not the issue. It is the form they take, the route by which they come into being and the authority with which they are endowed which matters. The use of them in a para-theological way by both traditions is I believe profoundly significant.

Perhaps the most powerful illustration of the importance of the difference in thinking in recent months has been the vexed issue of clarification of the Downing Street Declaration.

Consider the following quotations carefully:

*“the Government should seize the opportunity to provide clarification by authorising direct and verifiable talks with Sinn Fein.... It is my firm conviction that the IRA initiative is clearly an attempt to end the current stalemate around the issue of clarification and to move the peace process forward”.* Gerry Adams quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 5 April 1994.

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church challenged Gerry Adams to say.... *what clarification he wants.* (*Belfast Telegraph*, 5 April). In a radio interview the Moderator asked even more specifically for “*the exact specific issue*” Gerry Adams wanted clarified.

What exactly is going on? Why is Adams waiting for “clarification” and the Moderator for the naming of a specific detail. Could it be that there is an entirely different set of presumptions and expectations in the two men’s demands? Adams seems to be signalling that he is looking for a process of some kind. The Moderator seems to be looking for a word or phrase in the Declaration which is to be identified for clarification.

To Unionists it seems that Sinn Fein is seeking a process which looks for all the world like re-negotiation of the Declaration and for them this is unacceptable. Meanwhile Adams waits frustratedly for a process which he feels is natural and which ought to proceed out of the Declaration.

This apparent impasse can, I believe, be understood by looking at two quite different views of the Declaration in epistemological terms. Adams comes from a system of thinking which uses *a priori* general principles which are then developed by a deductive process - that is, he establishes general principles first and they provide him with a framework from which detail is logically worked out by a process of deduction.

Austin

The Moderator however comes from a tradition which starts by examining experience and moves *a posteriori* by an inductive process to establish principles - a tradition which examines detail first and then at a later stage moves to a framework when the detail has been worked through.

For Adams the Declaration is an *a priori* framework which he seeks to use as a starting point for a deductive process which may bring insights and developments which may lead to peace. For the average unionist the Declaration has validity if it is seen as the fixed end product of a process which has set all the detail in correct position first.

This analysis, if correct, would lead to the conclusion that the present logjam involves a massive communication problem - virtually two conflicting languages with no translation between them. Inductive and deductive thinking are just such different thought processes and do not dovetail easily. Proper understanding of this difference may help us to conduct political dialogue more effectively.

### Conclusion

I hope the foregoing has given a sketch of some of the ways in which religion may be able to interlace with conflicting political stances in a way which locks them into serious conflict, prevents meaningful communication and gives rise to misunderstanding, thence to manipulation by political spokespeople and finally to violence.

The influence of religion is not now as in the seventeenth century when the occupant of the pulpit could control all the messages which reached the people. The role of the church in conflict now is that religion controls the means of communicating the message, i.e. the language.

So to the final question- whether we need or can do anything about the way in which religion is operating in the Northern Ireland conflict and indeed in many other intractable conflicts world wide in which religion plays a leading part.

I take great heart from what I have been hearing these last weeks about the role of the churches in South Africa. Clergy it seems have played a key role in interpreting and explaining the election to the people. Bishop Tutu gave specific thanks to the clergy for this in a recent rally and I know from first hand just how much work some clergy put into this process.

Five years ago I argued in a series of articles for interpreters to help people in Northern Ireland to combat the kind of misunderstanding which this paper has tried to address. My suggestion now would be that a permanent inter Church Commission is needed to monitor events and speeches to ensure the fullest possible understanding of what is being perceived by the two main resident communities in this island at any time and to help church leaders give help to the whole community in developing a pluralism of understanding without any loss of faith in the value of each of the traditions in which we are all grounded.

Only if this were in place can a political vision involving an accommodation between the two main resident communities in Ireland succeed and become reality, avoiding being broken and frustrated on the jagged rocks of misunderstanding of the kind outlined in this paper. There are unhappily plenty of people in politics and religion who will be content to exercise power by standing on those jagged rocks in order hold power and frustrate reconciliation.

So to return to our starting point and the rainbow in Stuttgart:

From where I stand  
 At one of an infinity of points of view  
 I look through eyes distorted by past sights, perceptions, thoughts  
 And glimpse  
 My own distinctive understanding of the truth.

And yet I stand  
 On solid boundaried weight sustaining earth  
 And watch a landscape stable, seeming real  
 And watch  
 A rainbow in the wind cast fountain spray.

And you who stand  
 Denying that which I confess to see  
 And look through eyes trained in other experience and thought  
 Pause and listen  
 Lest differing truths we see become the battle ground for power. ☹

## Do-It-Yourself Exercises #2

# Cultures in conflict game

*Adapted from "Baffa-Baffa" and outlined by Fergus Cumiskey*

**Issues:** Cultures Meeting

**Suitable:** 16 and over

**Objective:** To simulate an experience of cultures in conflict to enable understanding of cultural codes and the conflict that can arise when cultures come into contact; to relate this understanding to Irish culture within Europe.

**Material:** Copy of culture cards. Flipchart sheets and markers. Two facilitators are needed for this activity.

- Procedure:**
1. Introduce the activity by explaining that every culture has a code of behaviour. For example in introductions the Japanese bow, English shake hands, French kiss etc. Other examples may be taken from food, etiquette, hospitality, etc. Explain that this exercise is in part about learning a certain culture with its codes of behaviour and then practising it.
  2. Facilitators divide the group in two. A facilitator accompanies each group to separate rooms if possible and briefs them on their culture. (*See Culture Code Cards overleaf*). Each culture practices its code of behaviour.
  3. After 5 minutes, half the participants from Culture A should visit Culture B and visa versa. They should all participate and engage in conversation. Culture B should be provided with a task to perform while visiting, e.g. to find out how many Culture A watch *Eastenders*, play football, smoke, etc.
  4. After another 5 minutes - facilitators instruct "A's" and "B's" to return to their respective groups. They share what they learned about the other culture. Now those who have not yet visited spend 5 minutes visiting the other culture. Again they return to their own culture and spend a few minutes reporting back.

### Discussion

The facilitator now brings the entire group together. He/She should sit in the centre of a circle with Culture A in a semicircle on one side and Culture B on the other. Ask the A's to describe the members of Culture B and then asks the B's to describe the members of Culture A. The responses should be written on separate flipchart sheets for all to see. Now allow each culture to say how the other culture "works". When this is completed each culture is given the opportunity to respond by saying how they "actually worked".

The final part of debriefing could focus on the "feelings" associated with the visits. This could bring up issues such as how it feels to be excluded, part of the out-group.

Relate the exercise to real life using the following pointers:

- a) what was the norm in Culture A but foreign to Culture B and vice versa? What is normal to Irish culture but foreign to other European cultures? And vice versa. This gives an opportunity to the facilitator to explore examples such as the rules about levels of eye contact in different cultures, rules about spitting or picking one's nose in public, rules about personal space, how closely people can sit together etc.
- b) How were cultural codes of behaviour learnt? Were they rational? Are they rational in real life?
- c) When did conflict occur? Was it when the other culture code was not understood *or* when our own culture code was assured to be right or the only one *or* when codes were the same *or* when they were different?

## Do-It-Yourself Exercises #2

### Culture code cards

#### Culture A

Every Culture has codes of behaviour - ways of behaving that give clues about the culture. You are part of Culture A. In your culture:

- a) People are warm, relaxed and loving;
- b) You begin conversations by holding each other on the left shoulder;
- c) You stand or sit very close to people when talking to them;
- d) Before talking business you always try to find out lots about the people themselves - their age, family, ties, favourite colours, everything about them;
- e) You remove your shoes indoors - especially when visiting people;
- f) Men visitors in you culture must never approach women or talk to them. If they do they are excluded from the group without explanation;
- g) Women in your culture may talk to men of their own culture or visiting women, but never visiting men.

#### Culture B

Every culture has codes of behaviour - ways of behaving that give clues about the culture. You are part of Culture B. In your culture:

- a) People are hard-working, competitive, business-like;
- b) You don't like to get close to strangers;
- c) When starting a conversation you shake hands from a distance and keep your distance after that;
- d) You keep conversation with strangers business-like. You never reveal personal details in conversation with strangers, only with members of your immediate family;
- e) You never look directly at people when talking to them;
- f) When visiting strangers if you feel unwelcome, it is a point of honour in your culture that you remove your shoes, shake the dirt from them and leave silently without replacing them;
- g) Men always approach women first to initiate conversation. It is considered extremely rude to leave a woman without a conversation partner.