Building Peace in Northern Ireland:
Christian Reconcilers in an Economy of Hate

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The Ardoyne neighborhood is not a place a tourist would want to visit. Its streets today are the front lines of what some would classify as a religious holy war, and are the regular backdrop for violent scenes of masked demonstrators, burning cars, and heavily armed soldiers and riot police. Guard towers, walls topped with barbed wire, armored cars, and helicopters are part of daily life in this area, but this neighborhood is not in the Middle East. Rather, it lies far to the north in Belfast, Northern Ireland, part of industrialized Western Europe. Here, row upon row of run-down brick tenements intertwine in a rusted-out, crumbling, crime-ridden tumor in the north end of the city. The people who live here are largely poor, unemployed, inadequately educated, and suffer from widespread drug and alcohol addictions. All of these ingredients create a dangerously volatile mix, but what makes the Ardoyne a particularly tense place is that its streets have been divided and subdivided between Catholic and Protestant zones, and the slightest provocation can become the spark that sets off an explosive chain-reaction of communal violence.

What may seem even more surprising to the outsider is that this is a description of the Ardoyne almost four years *after* the Good Friday Peace Agreement was signed in 1998. It is almost as if news of the agreement had never reached this place, and while British security operations have been scaled back over the last few years, violence in the form of recreational rioting, punishment beatings, shootings, and "kneecapping" still occurs regularly. On one level we have witnessed comparative success in the realm of political negotiations and government institutions—before the 1990s few thought they would ever see Sinn Fein sit down at the same table with the Democratic Unionists. At the street level, however, it is apparent that the peace process has had little impact.

In January 2002, when the initial research for this article took place, it appeared that the peace process was in danger of unraveling in spite of the basic optimism of diplomats and political leaders. Christian leaders who had dedicated themselves to peace building voiced concern that the politicians had not truly committed themselves to a comprehensive plan of reconciliation. They had only to point to the results of government policies: Statistics published in the *Belfast Telegraph* (Front page, 4 January 2002) show that 66% of people "now live in an area where the resident population is either 90% Protestant or 90% Catholic." This is an increase from 63% ten years ago. Sixty-eight percent of people between the ages of 18 and 25 have never had a meaningful conversation with a person of the opposite community, while 62% say that they have been victims of physical or verbal sectarian abuse since the IRA declared

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cease-fire in 1994. Only 5% of Catholics and 8% of Protestants work in an area dominated by the other group.

It was apparent even at the beginning of 2002 that radical changes had to be made—while the political institutions had been integrated, nothing had been done to fundamentally alter the fabric of the economy or the society. Most importantly, politicians proved again and again unwilling to engage in the process of communal healing that was absolutely essential to creating a normal society. Atrocities had been committed, and family members had been murdered by their neighbors, leaving no person in Northern Ireland untouched, yet the mood of politics was to just try to forget these things had ever happened. It is no wonder that people were left feeling wounded, ignored, and resentful: Their wounds were still raw and painful, and every new day without healing just reopened them. As in the Biblical parable, the house built on the sand came crashing down in October 2002, though perhaps the event was mercifully more of a whimper than a bang.

Now that the peace process is on ice, policy makers have an unprecedented opportunity to reexamine their priorities and start afresh, this time with a renewed understanding of their history, culture, and values. History is important in Northern Ireland, as are economics and religion, and all three of these elements have become interwoven to create a society based on sectarian hatred. If reconciliation and healing are to occur, people will have to undergo painful heart surgery to untangle their ideologies and cultural commitments and recast them in a constructive light. Justice will also have to be done. This means that those responsible for crime and terrorism must be held accountable, and this also means communities that have fallen victim to economic decay need to be rebuilt. There is a huge amount of work that needs to be done, but the first step is to untangle the elements that reinforce the sectarian culture.

Christians are in a unique position to carry out this work because such a large part of Northern Irish ethnic and cultural identity is derived from the Protestant and Catholic confessional histories. The only way to constructively reexamine sectarian ideologies is to critique them from within their own traditions, showing how a truer expression of Christianity pushes boundaries and seeks peace. In this regard, both Protestants and Catholics have tremendous theological resources at their disposal should leaders be willing to challenge their own cultural assumptions and make use of these resources to speak to their cultures. In the same way, radical Christians in Northern Ireland have demonstrated that faith can have real power in breaking down barriers and transforming broken communities through practical service. The path to true reconciliation in Northern Ireland will be dependent on Christians choosing to become part of the solution rather than maintaining the status quo.

In order to proceed properly with the work of reconciliation, peacemakers need to work from a balanced understanding of the sectarian system and how it came into being. Northern Ireland did not come into existence until 1921, when Ireland was partitioned as part of the peace settlement that ended the two-year

rebellion against British rule. Partition gave independence to the predominantly Catholic Republic of Ireland in the South, while the North was created as a Protestant state that would remain loyal to the Crown. This nevertheless left a large Catholic minority within Northern Ireland, a minority that aspired to see all of Ireland united as part of the Republic. Protestants feared losing their cultural identity and religious freedom should they become a minority within a Catholic state, a fear that became a reality for those Protestants who remained in the South after partition and saw their community wither away. They had also enjoyed centuries of economic and political dominance under the British Empire, which they were loath to surrender.

While contemporary Northern Ireland came into being in 1921, the sectarian divisions that plague it began in the sixteenth century. The English Crown, in its efforts to solidify political hegemony and extend its economic interests after the Protestant Reformation, sought to convert and fully integrate Catholic Ireland into its dominions, as it was considered a back door through which France could easily threaten England. By the 1600s, the Counter-Reformation and native resistance had made it impossible for a peaceful integration to take place, and the Crown resorted to coercive means in order to establish a loyal landowning class in Ireland. In a program of planned settlement known as the Ulster Plantation, the Crown gave large plots of land to English landlords, which were then parceled out and settled by English and Scottish peasants. Irish Catholic landholders were forcibly dispossessed in the process, and by 1641, 41% of the land in Ulster was Protestant controlled (Ruane and Todd 1996, 20).

Out of this process a three-tiered religious class system emerged. Anglican landlords, as members of the established church, possessed all political rights. In the middle were Scottish Presbyterian settlers, who composed the bulk of the Protestant population. As dissenters from the established church, Presbyterians were barred from public positions until 1780, although political inequality continued until well into the nineteenth century. They would, however, gain economic prominence as the Industrial Revolution swept through Britain. Nevertheless, their status as second-class citizens in Ireland has made Presbyterians a more natural bridge community between Anglicans and Catholics in the twentieth century. The United Irishmen movement in the 1790s saw many bourgeois Presbyterians, inspired by the ideology of Revolutionary France, ally themselves with Catholics in a failed effort to gain reforms from the Anglican-dominated Dublin Parliament (See 1986, 44).

Catholics occupied the lowest place in the pecking order. They were completely excluded from the political structure until 1828, and they were restricted mostly to areas outside of Protestant population centers (MacDonald 1986, 47-49). Among these Catholics were landowners of Old English and Gaelic ethnicity, who maintained a loyalty to the Crown that became increasingly tenuous with time, breaking into open rebellion in the seventeenth century. The English

colonial process largely destroyed the Catholic elite, who tended to emigrate as their lands and political positions were threatened. The result of this was that Catholic identity came to be seen as synonymous with disloyalty and backwardness, while to be Protestant was to be loyal to the Crown and comparatively privileged.

During the centuries between the Plantation and Partition, Protestants played a delicate game of dominance, dependence, and inequality with the Crown. In fact, the relationship between Protestants and the Crown has always been an uneasy one. Protestants, as the established rulers of Ireland for the British, depended on the backing of the Crown to maintain their security against the Catholic majority. However, Protestants have never hesitated to threaten to withdraw their loyalty and strike out on their own when it seemed that the Crown was unwilling to act in their interests.

The arrival of the Industrial Revolution greatly enhanced Protestant fortunes. While Catholics had seen some gains throughout the nineteenth century, industrial growth was confined almost totally to the Protestant Northeast. It was during this period that Belfast became a leading producer of linen and shipping for the British Empire. Due to sectarian hiring practices, Protestants held a disproportionate percentage of skilled labor positions, while Catholics were shunted into low-paying, unskilled work. Industrialization brought modern Ireland into existence, an Ireland characterized by highly uneven development between North and South and the creation of two highly segregated, antagonistic working classes. Partition in 1921 merely made these demographic disparities a political reality by drawing a border between the agrarian South, dominated by inward-looking Irish nationalists, and the industrial North, dominated by British-oriented Protestants ruling over a large Catholic minority.

The history of Ireland has thus been driven by powerful economic forces. Scholars have proposed a number of models to explain sectarian divisions in economic terms, which can be very helpful in pointing to the material basis for the culture of hate that pervades the streets. One of these is the uneven development model, in which a politically dominant core state controls most or all of the upper-level occupations and resources, relegating other groups to a poorly developed peripheral economy. This social and economic environment sets the stage for nationalist solidarity on the part of marginalized populations (See 1986, 13). This model also supposes that the economic integration of the peripheral group will cause a corresponding decline in this type of ethnic or nationalist identity. The uneven development model has traditionally been applied to Northern Ireland in terms of its relationship to the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, while others have begun to view Northern Ireland as the periphery of an increasingly unified European bloc (Probert 1978, 146). As we shall see, understanding Northern Ireland within the European context has increased importance for making sense of the peace process in the 1990s, and for making sense of its failure in 2002.

The weakness of the uneven development model is that it considers ethno-

centrism to be a product of material factors, and fails to consider ethnocentrism as an independent force. Because of this, it could not have predicted the outbreak of the Troubles in 1968, which occurred in spite of a long period of unprecedented socioeconomic advances for Catholics. Furthermore, support for the militant Sinn Fein party has only increased with time, which shows that Catholics have continued to be radicalized even as their economic lot has improved with time, a trend that is opposite of what the uneven development model would predict (McGarry 2001, 301-302).

Another important theory, called the split labor model, adds further understanding to the uneven development model by taking ethnocentrism into account as an independent force. According to this model, class alliances form along ethnic lines when a politically dominant worker population with a monopoly on the labor market is able to prevent capitalists from hiring from a cheap labor pool of subdominant workers. Thus, segregationist labor practices are maintained through grassroots pressure in spite of strong economic incentives for capitalists to abandon the practice.

Put together, these models illustrate how economics and ethnocentrism together drive sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland. In this particular context, ethnocentrism manifests itself in the emphasis on Anglican English and Scottish Presbyterian identity versus Irish Catholicism. As the age of modernist nationalism swept Europe in the nineteenth century, ethnic identity became increasingly a zero-sum conflict in a way that it had not been previously, resulting in increased consolidation of Protestant identity into one group. This ethnocentrism escalated into open conflict as the two groups competed for scarce resources—land in the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, and skilled jobs in the industrial sector in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (See 1986, 31).

Within the context of European integration, culturally triumphalist ideologies like Orangeism and Paisleyism thrive, in part, on resistance to global capitalism in defense of home-grown, Protestant-controlled industries. At different times the Orange Order has been a vehicle for both Protestant workers and elites to maintain their economic and political privileges. Workers have "played the Orange card" when they felt that the split-labor market was endangered, while elites have done so to protect their political ascendancy against outside influences (See 1986, 162, 165).

From this we can see that at the broadest level of understanding, ethnicity and material factors work in conjunction with each other to produce division in Northern Ireland. Protestants have defined an ethnic identity to protect their communal ties and territory, while Catholic identity became unified in response to coercive colonial domination. Elites of both sides have forged nationalisms for the advancement of their class interests.

There are several more strands to define in this picture that can give us an even more accurate understanding of the culture of sectarianism in Northern

Ireland. Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd have written an invaluable book that reflects more contemporary thinking on sectarianism. They identify five "dimensions of difference" that encompass both material and cultural dynamics: religious (Catholic vs. Protestant), ethnic (Gaelic Irish, Old English vs. New English, Scottish), colonial (native vs. settler), uneven development (civility vs. barbarism), and political (Nationalism/Republicanism vs. Unionism/Loyalism). For Ruane and Todd, the synthetic effect of all of these dimensions of difference is a power dynamic of dominance, dependence, and inequality based on differential access to political and economic resources (1996, 10-12). While there are many overlaps among these dimensions, they all individually function to separate the "us" from the "other" in such a way that "even if an individual stressed only one dimension of difference, he or she could still identify fully with his or her community in opposition to the other" (30).

As we have seen above, religion is the most obvious dimension of difference in Northern Ireland, and many uninformed observers are led to believe that because of this, the violence that has occurred there is fundamentally ideological or theological. Indeed, there are many who stress doctrinal heresy as a reason to separate themselves from the opposite community, even while acknowledging that "conversion" would enable reconciliation. By stressing religious difference, even the most politically passive fundamentalist contributes to the organic whole that constitutes the sectarian superstructure. There is thus a connection between sectarian theological discourse and violent confrontation on the street level, although rioters are overwhelmingly unchurched. Doctrinally, many uneducated or unchurched Protestants have remained suspicious of the Catholic hierarchy and sacramental system, which appears to be monolithic, superstitious, and subversive to democracy and constitutional politics. Political and religious demagogues such as Rev. Dr. Ian Paisley have been able to play on these fears, and political rhetoric has made liberal use of out-of-context scripture passages. Thus, even those who have never set foot in a church generally have a vocabulary of religious slogans at their disposal. To further complicate the picture, Michael MacDonald points out revealingly that Northern Ireland may be the only place in the world where one can be a Catholic Jew or Protestant atheist, thus showing that there is really no correlation between religious fervor and political commitment (MacDonald 1986, 9).

Religious identity is closely connected with ethnicity for both sides of the divide. For both communities, ethnicity is distinguished by a sense of shared heritage, reinforced by a feeling of collective grievance against the other group. History becomes a deadly weapon as each side demonizes the other through mythologized narratives of suffering and injustice, reminding the community of the continuing threat to its existence represented by the enemy population. In this sense, ethnicity is founded in collective mythology rather than in any historical reality. Irish ethnicity is theoretically based on a common Gaelic culture and language and shared Catholic faith, but this identity evolved considerably at the hands of the nationalist intelligentsia in the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. On the Protestant side, ethnicity is much more complex because there are many more possibilities for self-identification. Protestants have identified themselves variously as English, Scottish, British, Northern Irish, Ulster, or Irish. The most radical strands of Unionism have articulated an Ulster nationalism that is willing to sever ties with Great Britain should its position and identity be threatened by British policy. The reality reflected in identity polls has shown that, in both the Protestant and Catholic communities, people's self-identities cover a wide spectrum and overlap considerably.

The settler-native dimension has proven to be highly resilient and divisive. Even if the emotional resentments that it has engendered have taken on a quality of mythology, it still has theoretical utility in terms of understanding Northern Ireland economically. In spite of the fact that today Northern Ireland must be considered equally the home of Protestants and Catholics, the historical legacy of Protestantism being an outside colonial force has played into the hands of Republican propagandists, who have sought to portray them as foreign British oppressors. Economically speaking, as discussed above, it is sometimes helpful to view Northern Ireland as a colonial periphery, which is the assumption that undergirds the uneven development theory. However, the split labor market theory necessarily assumes the permanence of both groups even while recognizing the economic advantage of one of them.

The fourth dimension proposed by Ruane and Todd is that of civility versus barbarism. This dimension does not seem to have as much independent theoretical basis as a historical force, but it nevertheless is an ideological expression of superiority used to justify material dominance. Protestants came to be the driving force of most economic development and modernization in Ireland because of their political power over the Catholic population. Catholics were excluded from the British political and economic structures, while Protestants were able to make full use of British political, technological, and ideological advances. As Ruane points out, Catholic modernization and innovation only tended to confirm Protestant beliefs in their backwardness because of their different political and economic interests (1996, 27-28).

The final dimension emerged only in the nineteenth century with the rise of secular nationalism throughout Europe. Nationalism was singularly divisive in Northern Ireland because of the absolute claims that it made—each nationalist vision left no room for the aspirations of ethnic minorities, but demanded the right for its own state in which to pursue the community's own interests and potential.

Irish nationalism as an ideology emerged in resistance to British rule, and sought to create a Gaelic-Catholic nation-state. Like many third-world nationalisms, this ideology was given added impetus as a response to British attitudes of racial superiority. Of course, Irish nationalism contained a certain amount of mythology and idealization, as it largely ignored Protestant contributions to Irish nationalism and the fact that most Irish people no longer spoke Gaelic. On

the other side, more extreme Unionists have espoused an Ulster nationalism that seeks a Protestant state for a Protestant people. In the nineteenth century, many Protestants saw themselves as part of an Anglo-Saxon British nation and part of a greater imperial whole. Partition in 1920 was a severe blow to Irish nationalism, whose vision saw the Irish state as comprising the entire island of Ireland. However, this vision was mutually exclusive to the aspirations of Protestants, who not only feared a loss of their historic privileges, but also feared socio-political isolation as minorities in a Catholic state (Ruane and Todd 1996, 28-29).

The culture of hate and violence is maintained in Northern Ireland through the combination of all of these dimensions of difference. The conflict is not merely religious—it is religious, political, and economic, all rolled into one. The factions can be described as rival ethnicities, political factions, or religious confessions, or it can be said that they are all of the above. In this way an understanding can be gained of the sectarian system, and of how language and symbolism in the public sphere and at the street level all contribute to an organic whole. The picture that one gets in stepping back from the strife is that in the end it makes little difference what dimension of difference a combatant uses to justify his or her claims, just so long as the difference is established. Either way, communal interests are served, whether individual community members view the conflict as religious, political, or ethnic.

The socioeconomic structures that exist today in Northern Ireland are a direct product of its history of uneven development and a split labor market. Northern Ireland's economy has failed to diversify since the nineteenth century and has suffered accordingly. It continues to depend on the textile, synthetic fiber, and shipping industries, resulting in frequent economic downturns influenced by global market forces. The Troubles, which broke out in 1968, were intensified in the 1970s as the world oil crisis caused a collapse in Belfast's exports of supertankers and a dramatic rise in raw materials costs for other industrial sectors. Furthermore, the violence caused a sharp decrease in direct foreign investment, which began to recover only after the IRA cease-fire in 1994 and subsequent peace agreement in 1998 (Birnie and Hitchens 1999, 5-7).

In relation to the rest of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland has the highest regional unemployment figures. In 1995, unemployment was 13%, compared to the 8.8% UK average, but lower than the Republic of Ireland's 14.3%. Moreover, 51.6% of those classified as unemployed were without jobs for longer than 12 months (Birnie and Hitchens 1999, 11). Indeed, long-term unemployment is a problem endemic to Northern Ireland's urban areas, and is reflective of structural problems related to poor education and the lack of cross-communal labor mobility, resulting in highly regionalized labor markets (14). Young people with little education and no job prospects are easy targets for paramilitary recruiters, and sons often follow their fathers and grandfathers into the web of violence. In this way, paramilitary groups like the IRA, Ulster Defense Force, Ulster Defense Association, and Ulster Freedom Fighters are

able to take up the slack that the legitimate labor market cannot absorb. These groups have established a system of territorial patronage based on smuggling and drug rackets, and the problem of unemployment and organized crime has been exacerbated by the release of "political" prisoners under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. This is but one example of how the compromises of political negotiations have undermined the peace process by worsening the situation on the streets.

The unemployment figures given above do not even begin to do justice to the plight of some of the worst neighborhoods. In spite of affirmative action programs, Catholics still suffer from a higher unemployment rate than Protestants. In the predominantly Catholic Lower Ormeau area of Belfast, unemployment stood at 65% for people 18-25 years old in the 1980s, and overall unemployment in the area was at 42% when last measured in 1992 (Mornington Community Project Ltd. 2000, 1-2). While the average unemployment rates for Protestants are not as severe, there are nevertheless some deprived localities where unemployment reaches the 40-50% range. Because Protestants do not have a unifying institution under which to organize, they have had difficulties receiving European Union Structural Funds for the improvement of rundown housing estates. Catholics, on the other hand, have been able to do this through the Roman Catholic Church, and so they have seen improvements in their quality of life in recent years. The EU bureaucracy is difficult to impossible to crack for groups that do not have collective representation, and this fact alone has fueled resentment among Protestants, who feel that they have been ignored and marginalized by the peace process.

As we can see from this, Northern Ireland is suffering from a cycle of violence and poverty. Poverty and unemployment contribute to paramilitary activity and recreational rioting, which in turn discourage economic growth, producing more poverty and unemployment. Since 1998, the urban landscape has undergone rapid demographic change as middle-class families have fled the tense inner cities for the suburbs and countryside whenever it has been economically feasible. The consequence has been a higher "chill factor," meaning less cross-communal contact in daily life, affecting choices on where to work, shop, and send children to school. This has also meant increased urban ghettoization. The process is accelerated by intimidation campaigns, in which homes of holdout families are vandalized or firebombed, and their occupants threatened or assaulted until they are forced out of the neighborhood.

It seems that, with all of the forces of sectarianism united against reconciliation and peacemaking, it would have been impossible for Northern Ireland to accept power-sharing institutions in 1998. The Good Friday Agreement was overwhelmingly supported by both communities, however, and this raises the question of how this could come about. Toward the end of their book, Ruane and Todd raise the issue of international involvement in Northern Irish affairs, and suggest an increasing importance of international opinion in altering the

currency of discourse. This moves beyond traditional analyses, which tend to maintain a narrow focus on North-South relations within Ireland and relations with the UK. However, the second half of the twentieth century has seen the globalization of capitalism and the introduction of new post-modern ideological norms in conjunction with this, characterized by language of cultural and moral relativism.

The internationalization of political discourse broke in on Northern Ireland with a shock in the late 1960s during the Civil Rights movement. Both Catholic and liberal Protestants demonstrated for an end to structural injustice against Catholics, and did so using the language of black Civil Rights activists in the U.S., singing "We Shall Overcome" and using the same slogans and symbolism. Globalization and mass media seemed to have suddenly created an international language on norms of social justice. However, the lack of a secular activist tradition in Northern Ireland allowed Republicans to reassert traditional Irish symbols and to reclaim the movement for their own aims, and the violence that followed quickly moved away from its original secular activist tone (See 1986, 126).

Since then, post-modernity has advanced hand in hand with global capitalism. As the opening of new markets has sought to tear down national barriers and pave the way for peace and prosperity, a new language of multiculturalism, tolerance, secularism, and relativism has provided a new ethic for bridge-building, as well as an increased awareness of global events. The Troubles' beginning in the late '60s launched Northern Ireland into international attention, and the Clinton presidency made peace in Northern Ireland an American interest, and encouraged fair employment and American investment. The increased integration of the EEC and the drive toward a common currency in Europe was also an important factor in the 1990s, in which peace and stability in Northern Ireland were seen as important European interests.

It has already been suggested that Orangeism and Paisleyism were a reaction to these international trends. Protestant hard-liners had further incentive to resist these trends because Nationalists encouraged globalization as a way of eroding economic barriers with the South and paving the way to a united Ireland. Moreover, Nationalists have supported the European Union and the emergence of a common currency in hopes that they will erode British sovereignty over the North (McGarry 2001, 305). This is a reversal of prewar Irish Nationalism, which sought to protect its markets through isolationism. However, the 1950s brought a liberalization of Irish trade policy and a consequent improvement in fortunes. The "Celtic Tiger" economy of the 1990s may have been an illusion, but the Irish economy did experience unprecedented growth thought to be a result of European integration.[1]

Indeed, it seems as though the economic interests of many locally-based Protestant capitalists in Northern Ireland would be best protected within the context of union with the UK. The economy of the North is more industrial than its Southern neighbor, but has not diversified. Its strongest sectors are now

being threatened by the emergence of competition from former Soviet-bloc states that have just joined the EEC, and this means that Northern Ireland will have to compete for foreign direct investment and for allocation of EU Structural Funds as a Priority One region. Moreover, integration into the EU will mean increased labor and environmental controls and regulations, which will probably raise production costs and make demands of worker productivity and entrepreneurial innovation that have not been demonstrated in Northern Ireland until now (Birnie and Hitchens 1999, 103-105).

Another factor that works against globalization in the North is monetary policy. Evidence has shown that the Republic of Ireland, as a peripheral economy, has been hurt by a strict EU monetary policy designed along German lines. For the UK, integration would also be harmful, as interest rates in Germany and the UK have generally been on opposite cycles, and they would thus experience devastating synchronization problems (Birnie and Hitchens 1999, 107). It therefore seems that there is a clear advantage for some to remain within the context of a strong UK currency independent from the Euro.

It is clear that the peace process in Northern Ireland did not take place in a political and economic vacuum. It was a huge step when all parties agreed that constitutional issues could be decided only by consent, rather than by force, and it was a step that took place within the context of a new international engagement, not only from the Irish and British governments led by Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair, but also by the U.S. delegation led by George Mitchell. Furthermore, the ongoing process now sees discussion and debate on a special Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland as a spin-off of human rights legislation passed in the EU. The stiffest resistance to the entire process is (not surprisingly) coming from Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which sees it as a threat to the traditional Protestant position in Northern Ireland and to the particular position of local capital and family firms, which heretofore have been safe under the wing of the British welfare state. There has been a recent increase in Protestant unrest in the inner cities as workers have begun to feel marginalized by new government attitudes and policies, and their interests in terms of employment and housing have been ignored by the European bureaucracy.

When these socioeconomic factors are taken into account, it is not at all surprising that the power-sharing Assembly was on such shaky footing throughout 2002, finally dissolving in October. The last two years have only seen more segregation and increasingly radicalized politics on both sides, with Sinn Fein and the DUP each expanding their support bases. David Trimble's moderate Ulster Unionist Party struggled to maintain leadership of the Protestant community as events continued to polarize the working classes. Today there is really little hope that devolved institutions will be able to reconstitute, because such bodies require a strong core of moderates to keep them from flying apart. A power-sharing Assembly controlled by hard-liners is simply an

oxymoron, since the stated raison d'être of the DUP has been to oppose power-sharing in the absence of several difficult Republican concessions.

Northern Ireland thus stands at a crossroads where it must make some painful choices. It is clear that the first cadre of policymakers failed by not pursuing a comprehensive reconciliation program, and now they must do so or risk losing control of the entire situation. The advantage that they have today is that the people of Northern Ireland have experienced a prolonged period of comparative normalcy, and will be more willing to invest themselves in whatever it takes to prevent a return to the warfare of the 1970s and '80s. Fortunately, there have been a small but heroic number of Christian clerics and laymen who are already doing effective reconciliation work that can be considered a model for any comprehensive plan that is enacted.

A major reason that the current peace process has stalled is that it really only addressed issues from the top down. Politicians failed to listen to grass-roots leaders who were actually making a difference, and this was due to the very nature of Northern Irish politics. The traditional assumption of democratic societies is that political parties will represent ideological visions, but this is not the case in Northern Ireland. The Rev. John Dunlop, a Presbyterian minister and former Moderator of the General Assembly, expressed concern early in 2002 that each party represented at Stormont represents an ethnic identity, and so the power-sharing Assembly has actually institutionalized sectarian divisions. The effect of this is only to increase the burgeoning problem of self-segregation, which is being encouraged and exploited by paramilitary crime rings. Dunlop nevertheless expressed support for power-sharing as a "necessary interim arrangement to foster the politics of cooperation at the level of the Executive" (Dunlop 2002). In other words, Dunlop sees the Executive formed by the Good Friday Agreement as a temporary arrangement to help foster more permanent peace and reconciliation programs at all levels of society. A more permanent arrangement can only be supported by a society with a renewed vision and commitment to living together equally and peacefully.

An example of how institutionalized sectarianism has played itself out on the street level has been seen in the financial plight of the highly effective Mornington Community Project on the Lower Ormeau Road. This Presbyterian community center is located in a predominantly Catholic working class neighborhood that has recently been the scene of tension and violence during the summer marching season. The neighborhood suffers from a 42% overall unemployment rate, although among people who are 18-25 years old it stood at 65%, figures which testify to the deprivation of the area (Mornington Community Project 2001, 1-2).

Mornington offers an impressive array of services to the people of the neighborhood. The center of the project is the Gaslight Coffee Shop, which offers good, inexpensive meals and provides a relaxed environment where people in the community can meet and talk with staff and volunteers. It also continually employs six trainees who receive critical training and work experience,

after which nearly all will secure permanent employment (17). Through its employment training courses and Jobskills Programs, Mornington has made a dent in the unemployment figures in the area. Out of 397 people who participated in them, 100 found work, 138 went on to further training or education, and 159 reverted to unemployed status (7). Mornington provides an outreach to children and youth through after-school homework clubs, mothers and toddlers' groups, and young men's and young women's clubs. Staff are always available to offer advice on welfare, health, and legal matters (Humpheries 2002; Mornington Community Project 2001, 9).

Essentially, the Mornington Community Project has become a nucleus for the Lower Ormeau area, and it offers almost every service for which there is a need. Much of the funding for the project has come through the European Union and the local government. Given the integral role that it is playing in community development, it may be surprising that it is currently on a shoestring budget because funding has been "decimated by unwarranted fluctuations in related government strategy, and by unethical, politically motivated manipulation of funding structures" (18). To put the wording into common language, the authorities have been reallocating funds to community centers run by political parties as a reward for refraining from violence. These parties are using the money to shore up their own territorial constituencies, and the money is not resulting in a fundamental change in the hearts and minds of paramilitary combatants in spite of the peaceful language of their political leaders.

This fact is an alarming injustice, and illustrates in very concrete terms how institutionalized sectarianism has played itself out in supposed "peacemaking" sponsored by the government. Policies like these reveal that politicians see "peace" as an absence of violence rather than a truly reconciled society. In effect, the government is paying off paramilitaries for not carrying out attacks, and the paramilitaries are able to accomplish their goals of segregating society more effectively through government sponsorship than they ever could through violence.

The solution in this particular case is obvious: Fund more endeavors like the Mornington Community Project that operate independently of the government and of the urban political machines. Mornington is just one among many Christian groups who are doing invaluable grassroots community development work by relocating to the most afflicted areas and bringing resources and skills to the local people. Christian community development work is particularly essential to Northern Ireland because of its dual focus on social justice and personal values. Not only does it provide social and economic resources for the down and out, but it has proven to positively change lives and steer people away from the path of violence and toward positive values of peace and reconciliation.

Christians are also making important contributions in the area of education. The Irish Council of Churches' Peace Education Program has formulated

a school curriculum called Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU), which has been widely disseminated in state, Catholic, and integrated schools alike. The content of the curriculum is essentially secular, and is distributed in close cooperation with government agencies as schools express interest in adding the materials to their curriculum. The materials themselves are designed for children as young as primary one (the U.S. equivalent of pre-school or kindergarten), and shift in focus for older students. For instance, primary one materials focus on emotional awareness and social skills, while primary seven materials acquaint students with peaceful role models such as Martin Luther King and Mohandas Gandhi.

The Irish School of Ecumenics, affiliated with Trinity College in Dublin, offers a program entitled *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*, to be used by churches, encounter groups, and schools. It is meant to walk people through a process in which they confront their own sectarianism while building relationships with people of the opposite community. The resource packet that accompanies the course seeks to conceptualize and define sectarianism in all of its aspects, stressing its systemic nature and demonstrating how every individual is unconsciously a contributor to this system (Naylor 2001, 63).

Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI) is an example of a body that does single identity peacebuilding. A single identity organization is one that focuses on speaking to its own culture by offering an insider's critique of cultural commitments and assumptions. As its name suggests, ECONI seeks to mobilize the substantial evangelical community in Northern Ireland toward building bridges. Evangelicals comprise 12-18% of the population and are a major force within all of the Protestant denominations. However, they have also traditionally been uncritical supporters of the Protestant community, and thus their commitment to Christ was all too often "co-opted into political/ nationalist agendas." In this way, Christians as a whole lost the ability to critique society from a prophetic standpoint. Many clergy and laymen recognized this problem, and ECONI was birthed in 1988 when they came together to publish a series of scripture studies entitled *For God and His Glory Alone*. The title was meant to contradict the popular slogan "For God and Ulster," and openly called into question previous cultural assumptions (ECONI 2002).

ECONI's work is effective because it is able to galvanize its target community using its own language. Evangelicals distinguish themselves by their commitment to the Bible as God's Word to humankind, and so ECONI stresses the Biblical mandate to seek peace and justice, build bridges, and love one's enemies. It also uses scripture as a basis for critical thinking about society and culture, and resources churches and political leaders through seminars and publications. ECONI's work is challenging Protestants to recast popular cultural narratives in a more balanced light, while reconsidering the way symbolism is used to represent the community. In this way, ECONI's voice on politics and culture has been holistically informed by theology, history, sociology, and anthropology.

The few examples given above are examples of how Christians have already been an effective voice for reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, these voices are still in the minority. The Rev. Kenneth Newell estimates that only 10% of clergy of either confession are actively involved in peacebuilding efforts (Newell 2002). A major reason for this is that clergy themselves are products of the sectarian system, and have been so focused on burying the dead and comforting the bereaved over the past 30 years that they have failed to look beyond their communities. Pietist theologies have also discouraged many Christians from considering broader social action beyond the narrower concerns of individual salvation and sanctification, although this type of theology is now under major critique by theologians and by groups like ECONI. Perhaps a more potent force preventing pastors and priests from building bridges is the fear of backlash from their own congregations. Education and community development programs can counter this by raising up new generations to be future reconcilers.

Any future reconciliation program must therefore take seriously the efforts of Christian peace builders. Christianity is still a major shaper of culture in Northern Ireland, unlike in the rest of Europe, a fact that is borne out statistically. In 1995, approximately 34% of the population actively attended Roman Catholic churches, while approximately 18.6% attended the Church of Ireland, and 22.4% attended the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. These figures show that a total of 75% of the population attended one of the three largest denominations, and these statistics do not include smaller denominations like Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, and free churches (Dunlop 1995, 8-9).[2]

Christian scripture and tradition contain tremendous resources that can be drawn on as a foundation for reconciliation efforts. Christian faith has been a driving force for many who have carried the message of peace into the inner cities coupled with a willingness to serve those in need regardless of the cost to their own safety. It is time for political leaders to admit the failure of an approach that is only top-down, and for them to reward and encourage the efforts of those who have understood the true nature of the problems and found effective ways of mending them at the grassroots level. Power-sharing institutions at the top can be effective only if they are willing to forgo the easy paths of political expediency and adopt policies that will transform the culture of sectarian hatred from the inside out.

NOTES

1. Birnie and Hitchens argue that the "Celtic Tiger" was a myth, and that the Republic of Ireland stands to lose out if it joins a common currency. With the introduction of the Euro in the Republic in January 2002, economists will soon be able to make a judgment on this.

2. Percentages are taken from numerical attendance figures provided by Rev. John Dunlop, and assume a population of 1.5 million.

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