

Critical Church Structures *in the 1970s* period - the Role of the Church and Priorities

Committees

By David Bird

During the 1970s, two central Church committees played a most important role in steering the Church of Ireland through this most challenging of times. The Role of the Church Committee was originally formed in 1969, and thereafter gradually and steadily established itself as being able to distil the various views of its members from widely different backgrounds and provide the considered Church of Ireland viewpoint on the political, social and economic issues of the day. The depth and breadth of its work can be seen in the report to general Synod in 1980. All of its work was done by a voluntary committee. An official secretary/researcher, Jim McGaffin, was not appointed until 1980.

The second very important committee was the Priorities Committee established in May 1977, under the chairmanship of the bishop of Derry, the Rt Revd Dr R.H.A. Eames. As the financial demands on the funds available to the Representative Church Body increased, the Priorities Committee was established to 'give urgent consideration of the priorities involved in the stewardship of the Church's material resources'.

The *Gazette* was of the opinion that in order to find the money necessary for increasing 'religious purposes', the Committee would have to 'go to the country'. And this is what happened. The monies raised by the Priorities Fund allowed a planned approach to the financing of church projects at local and national levels. Today grants are allocated under a number of headings: Ministry; Retirement; Education; Outreach Initiatives and Innovative Ministry in a Rural Context. In 2018, over €700,000 was disbursed.

When appointed to the House of Bishops, in June 1975, Bishop Eames became the Church's youngest bishop since Disestablishment in 1870. From the very start of his episcopate, he made a significant contribution to building bridges and reconciliation. The *Gazette* report covering his enthronement in St Columb's cathedral, Derry, captured his determination to 'Take a Risk in Seeking Peace' and building relationships with other Church leaders, including the Most Revd Edward Daly, Roman Catholic Bishop of Derry, as the image below shows (*Church of Ireland Gazette*, 4 July 1975).

Take a risk in seeking peace

Bishop of Derry and Raphoe

Right Rev. Dr. Robert H.A. Eames the new Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, was enthroned in St. Columba's Cathedral, Londonderry, on Thursday, in the presence of a congregation representing the Diocese of Derry, and the other main religious denominations and of the civic life of the district.

At 10.30, Bishop Eames, the former rector of St. Mark's Dundela, Belfast, is probably the youngest priest to have been elected a Bishop of the Church of Ireland in modern times.

FIRST TIME

Taking part in the procession in the Cathedral was the Roman Catholic Bishop of Derry, Most Rev. Dr. Edward Daly, who was 49 when he was consecrated last year. He was the first Roman Catholic cleric to take part in a service in St. Columba's Cathedral.

The Presbyterian Church was represented by the Moderator of Derry Presbytery, Rev. Philip Bradley; and the Methodist Church by Rev. J. Williamson, Clooney Hall Methodist Church.

THREE HMI'S

The laity present included three of Her Majesty's Lieutenants, Mr. T.F. Cooke (Londonderry City), Colonel M. W. McCorkell (Londonderry County) and the Duke of Abercorn (Tyroone); the Mayor of Londonderry, Alderman Ivor Canavan and the Mayoress, Mrs. Moira Canavan; the Deputy Mayor, Alderman James Hegarty and Mrs. Hegarty; two High Sheriffs, Mr. H. Bennet (City) and Dr. Wilbur Temple, (County Londonderry); the Chairman of a number of District Councils and their wives; Commander Peter Campbell-Grove representing the Hon. the Irish Society, and Lady Moira Campbell-Grove; the Chairman (Mr. S.H. Cochrane) and members of the Harbour Commission and their wives; and members of the Diocesan Council and their wives.

Taking part in the Procession were the clergy and Chapter of Derry Diocese, some members of the Chapter of Raphoe Diocese; the Chancellor of Derry Diocese (Mr. W.D. Stevenson) and the Diocesan

Registrar (Rev. Canon B.T. Humphreys).

ADMITTED

At the West Door of the Cathedral the Bishop formally knelt three times with his pastoral staff and was admitted by the Dean of Derry (Very Rev. George Good).

The enthronement ceremony was conducted by the Dean of Derry. The first Lesson was read by the Mr. T.F. Cooke, and the second Lesson by the Archdeacon of Derry (Ven. Ernest Hadden). The organist and choir-master was Mr. Michael Hoeg FRCD.

INSTALLED

The Diocesan Registrar read the Mandate of the Archbishop of Armagh for the Enthronement and after Bishop Eames had made the Declaration, the Dean conducted him to the Throne and installed him as Bishop of Derry.

The Choir sang the anthem: "Sing we merrily" (Cranb.)

In his sermon, Bishop Eames said many who tried to interpret their role in the world in a purely Christian manner found much to confuse and unsettle them. They found a continuing dilemma between what their Church asked them to believe and the codes of behaviour, the principles and practices of a community springing from a rapidly growing materialism and secularism. The sort of awe and reverence that were once reserved for the sacred, were more and more being directed towards man-made and man-initiated solutions to their economic, social and political problems.

TRENDS

In Ireland he continued the trends of history their basically insular attitudes, the reverence connected with many of their institutions and their current preoccupations with the problems of violence, had all helped to blind them to the process of secularisation. Their methods of establishing values had changed radically in many instances attitudes towards social issues were no longer the purely Christian process they once appeared to be.

There was a great need

for the Christian Church to engage itself in a debate of substance and value with the secular society, he said.

SPEAK CLEARLY

"This debate cannot delay much longer, too many already have told us we are irrelevant to the world in which we live," Bishop Eames continued: "Perhaps one reason for this state of affairs could be that, as a Church, we have been reluctant to exercise one of the most important functions God has given us to perform within society. The church is called to be a voice of prophecy; to help man to analyse his problems in a relevant way but also to caution, to encourage, and to predict, too frequently we find ourselves reacting to events. Would it not be much closer to our real role in society if we were prepared to speak clearly in terms of the future."

GRACE

The Church, said Dr. Eames must pray for the grace to be "the means of allowing all men to see the light of Christ through sacrament, prayer, word and witness; the agency of hope in every situation because she herself is based on the hope of Easter morning; involved and identified with the success and suffering of men that she can speak to them and for them but never lose the role of prophet; the means whereby society can gauge matters of social, economic and political importance against the Christian ethic; and at all times, the agency of renewal and reconciliation between God and man and between men themselves."

Continuing, Dr. Eames said he came as Bishop of Derry at a time when the vast majority of the people of the Province were totally weary of the violence and suffering of the past few years.

CONDITIONED

"We are now conditioned to live at a level of personal tension and apprehension which is without equal in modern European history," he said. "There has been war, revolutions and violence before in our world but never before has a community had to endure such a prolonged and vicious period of self-destruction as ours."

"Once more the violent society has seen an upsurge in that most evil of all crimes — sectarian murder; the cold-blooded murder of a man, woman or child for the only reason that they belong to a particular religious denomination," said Bishop Eames.

BEYOND COMPREHENSION

"Let us say again, as our Church has said so often in the past, such actions cannot be justified by any argument, any philosophy, any political ideal or any human emotion. Those who commit such bestial actions, whether they claim to be Protestant or Roman Catholic, put themselves beyond any human comprehension. No one who claims to be a Christian,

other denominations including the Roman Catholic Bishop of Derry, Most Rev. Ed. Daly, at the Enthronement Ceremony in Derry Cathedral.

happiness and blessing in their retirement among us."

ENCOURAGED

Dr. Eames said his wife and he had been greatly encouraged by the welcome they had received from the people of the city and diocese, he added: "I ask for your prayers and your support. When it is necessary to represent your views or your position I will

UNFORGETTABLE

"I have seen — as you have seen here — unforgettable examples of human courage, compassion and love," he continued. "We have seen the indomitable will and humour of the ordinary people of Ulster, who have taken it all — and still manage to hold on to the sanctity of family life with pride and hope."

"Such people have never felt the need to become members of a private army. Such people would never claim to be heroes. Such people would never wish to be classified with the violent society. Yet how many of us have played a part through the violence of the tongue, the violence of indifference or selfishness or the violence of silence?"

NEW INITIATIVE

"Here, as in so many other departments of our life, there is a desperate need for what we call a new initiative — the initiative which comes from the life and action of the committed disciple of Christ in the ordinary everyday things of life. To be worthy of the call of Christ we must continue to talk, to pray and to meet with those separated from us by tradition, by denominational emphases but united in the same desire to kneel at Calvary. None of us have anything to lose by such contacts. We have all something to contribute. But we have everything to lose, if we think any one Church has a monopoly of the truth."

Bishop Eames asked if the leadership the Christian Church was called upon to give in the Province was the leadership of providing one voice in the face of the common challenge of man's inhumanity to man or injustice? That in those areas of common concern, where man was in genuine need, it would be the Christian voice, the Christian conscience, the Christian answer which would be offered; that where they, as individuals, were asked to consider any programme of policy, any plan or proposal they would all be prepared to ask but one question — is it Christian?

TAKE A RISK...

Continuing, Bishop Eames said they had been encouraged by much that had been taking place at the Convention in Belfast, and he added: "We say something of hope and encouragement to those we have elected to that Convention? We pray for you. We ask you, in the name of God who made us all — Take a risk in seeking peace."

Concluding, Dr. Eames said he stood at the opening of a new chapter in the long



The Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, Rt. Rev. R. H. A. Eames, with clergy and representatives from other denominations including the Roman Catholic Bishop of Derry, Most Rev. Ed. Daly, at the Enthronement Ceremony in Derry Cathedral.



The Bishop of Derry and Raphoe with his mother and other members of his family at the Enthronement at Derry Cathedral.



The Bishop of Derry and Raphoe in time honoured custom, demands entry to his Cathedral.



A less formal grouping.



The two Bishops in Derry.