

APPENDIX H

THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON THE PAST

INTRODUCTION

The Church of Ireland, through a group appointed by the Standing Committee of the General Synod, welcomes the opportunity afforded by the Consultative Group on the Past to make a submission. We are conscious that there are many different, and indeed contrasting, perspectives on the past and suggestions for the future of Northern Ireland. We are aware also that this is a time of experimentation, transition and fluidity in the establishment of political structures locally and that nobody is in a position to predict what things will look like even in five years' time. The Church of Ireland is an all-Ireland church and in itself lives with the possibilities and tensions which that identity brings. The members of the Church of Ireland have been and remain part of, and contributors to, Irish life and Irish history North and South. Four of twelve of our dioceses – Derry and Raphoe; Clogher, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh; Armagh – are cross-border. Two of our dioceses – Connor; Down and Dromore – are entirely in Northern Ireland. Six dioceses are entirely within the Republic of Ireland. Our responsibilities towards one another as well as our responsibilities to other members of the civic societies of which we are part are shaped by this human geography. They are shaped also by many other factors which are imperatives asked of us by a life lived in response to the presence of God throughout all creation and patterned on the teaching and example of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels, embedded in Holy Scripture, transmitted through tradition and assessed by reason. This Anglican methodology is part of the weave of the Church of Ireland.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE LEGACY OF THE EVENTS OF THE PAST 40 YEARS

- (1) **Identity:** Throughout the period of The Troubles, as this time-span of forty years has become known, a major motivation among people was to maintain their identity, both religious and cultural, while being subjected to intense pressure and intimidation. In many contexts, retrospect is a luxury of the forward march of time. However, assessment and analysis of one's own actions and of the actions of others is important and, indeed, essential if both the history of which one was part and the lessons which one can learn from it are to be understood. Undoubtedly one of the outcomes of this experience was to heighten and strengthen denominational identity. This has often been described in terms of sharpening a tribal self-understanding and for many this is an accurate description of what happened. For others it is too simplistic, leaving unacknowledged the diversity which remained within the Church of Ireland throughout this period of turmoil. One of the continuing legacies of all of this is to make a programme of diversity, in a society where, in the past and into the present, the churches have had so dominant a role, hard to understand, easy to sidestep and difficult to implement. A further outcome is that 'the phenomenon of Drumcree' remains, many years later, a difficulty for the Church of Ireland in its taking its place as a contributor to a newly envisioned society in Northern Ireland.

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- (2) **Diversity:** Beyond the perspective of Northern Ireland itself, there is a recognition that competing and rival orthodoxies in historiography tend to suppress ‘the other’ rather than finding space for diversity. In this regard, the experience of the Church of Ireland as an all-Ireland church is illuminating. An important legacy from a longer historically documented past is the recognition that all voices be heard. It is important that present needs and escalating twitchiness about the shelf-life of current party political accommodations in Northern Ireland do not obscure or seek to silence voices other than one’s own. The totality of historical experience and memory teaches us lessons from right across Irish history. The experience of the longer time-span in the Republic of Ireland since the earlier Troubles of 1916-1923 is such that a minority Protestant community met repeatedly during dangerous and troubled times with rigid and doctrinal ‘justifications’ of what took place and what affected them most destructively. A further outcome of the application of ‘the lens of history’ is that many Nationalist and Republican people feel that, as a result of this and other factors, what they perceive to have been a noble tradition of independence, deriving ultimately from the French Revolution and including Protestants among its founding fathers, has been slighted by academic historians whom the Republicans have, in turn, labelled revisionists. The danger of this happening in Northern Ireland is heightened by the fact that majority and minority status is much more evenly balanced. Truth-telling is the first casualty of such an intellectual war of emotions. We strongly recommend to the Consultative Group that truth-telling and history-writing, understood critically and made accessible to so-called ‘ordinary people’ to enable them properly to understand the past, become priorities and be financed appropriately.
- (3) **Quiet Decency:** The Book of Common Prayer used daily for worship in the Church of Ireland speaks of ‘patient continuance in well-doing.’ In simple terms, this is the practical philosophy of ‘getting on with it’ and keeping on doing the good thing for others in one’s own service of Almighty God. This quiet decency, such silent normality maintained and sustained in a complex, destructive period of Irish history could be in danger of being unrecognized in the competition for recognition of need and suffering which the Consultative Group itself has, in part and rightly, been established to address. This in no way seeks to diminish the needs of victims, the recognition of trauma, the quest for healing of relationships, the urgency of programmes of reconciliation. These remain as urgent as ever. It is, nonetheless, a warning not to take normality for granted and not to assume too casually that ‘the people in the middle’ will do the seemingly obvious thing without a little thanks and encouragement to keep going and to go further. The contribution of church people, lay and clerical, and not least in the Church of Ireland tradition the Mothers’ Union, in being a voice of common sense, compassion and restoration of others to living a life characterized by respect for oneself and for other people in a climate of fear and violence ought to be honoured. Its place in the legacy of forty years is not to be diminished or taken for granted by any politician or civil servant.

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- (4) ***Sense of Injustice:*** A further legacy, and one which will not go away, affecting urban and rural areas alike, is the deep sense of injustice resulting from the forty years of The Troubles. It is imperative that the Consultative Group undertakes to convey to those in government the need to address this as a matter of utmost seriousness and urgency. If this is not done effectively, those who remain active in illegal organizations will continue to nurse aspirations which they see as realizable through illegal means. At the same time, those who wish nothing but a fair wind to the newly developing political process and to the broad range of possibilities articulated in *A Shared Future* document will become disillusioned, cynical about political life and disengaged. Many ways of doing this work have been suggested over the years. It is imperative that the initiatives such as Healing through Remembering, truth-telling etc. are not pushed to one side now that there is a greater sense of peacefulness. Much discussion has raged about a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. A serious study needs to be undertaken to assess what long-term positive impact this can have and how such a Commission would deal with what we call ‘the intimacy of evil’ in a society where there are deep-seated and highly personalized enmities. Were such a Commission to be inaugurated, there are obvious problems which will need to be addressed. For example, there are many perpetrators who are also victims and vice versa; there is tremendous confusion about the language of forgiveness and reconciliation as used in a context distinct from their Godly and theological context. Issues which need to be faced and addressed include the following recognitions: that paramilitary organizations were operating outside the law; that special powers were implemented; that some acts by individuals within the security forces were outside the law. The denial of the application of the proper course of justice would be a wilful betrayal of all who have suffered and been bereaved and of all who throughout the forty years upheld and applied the rule of law. This is not to argue for an aggressively punitive system of justice. Rather it is something quite different. It is to request the Consultative Group to ensure that justice is done in such a way that a new society can be built in trust and in such a way as to make possible sustained community healing at local level. The putting of weapons of terrorism and destruction of the human life of others beyond use is one thing. The putting of the mindset behind it beyond use in the future Northern Ireland society constitutes a deeper, yet essential, aspiration and expectation. This request is put in the context of recognizing that the justice system ought not to be seen solely in terms of penalty but should also seek to enable people who have done wrong to acknowledge such wrong, to regret it and to take steps to restore, as much as is possible, a positive relationship with their victims. It is vital that the Consultative Group address this if the past is not, in that well-worn cliché, to re-invent itself rather quickly.
- (5) ***Disillusionment and Disengagement:*** The danger of disillusionment and disengagement on the part of those who feel that ‘things are going nowhere’ is a genuine legacy of the past forty years. You might well argue that this is a luxury of those least affected but it is a recurring danger. Northern Ireland still suffers from,

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and shows no sign of doing otherwise, elective emigration on the part of those whose opportunities, experiences and education make them obvious leaders in the community locally, nationally and internationally. The era of The Troubles ought to alert members of the Consultative Group that this can happen again. Alarming statistics of unemployment were an ingredient of The Troubles which began in the late 1960s. These were engendered by a dearth of opportunity for work. The same danger, in a different form, is here today if insufficient forward planning is put into (1) an imaginative educational system which offers to all practical and vocational skills appropriate to a newly evolving technological and digital age together with (2) the encouragement of intellectual rigour enabling prospective leaders to envision that future and (3) language skills for international life - all within a context of life-long collaborative learning. To miss the educational boat or to continue to see education as a passport to departure from Northern Ireland will be disastrous and the Consultative Group must make representations to ensure that this does not continue to happen, at all costs. Leadership in church and community will be atrophied if such is the case and church-members and constituents, for they are ultimately the same people, will be the losers. The Church of Ireland Hard Gospel Project has identified a number of weaknesses in leadership within the Church of Ireland during the period of The Troubles in a spirit of honesty and in an attempt to understand the things which we did badly as well as recognize the things we did well. Some of these weaknesses are: while looking after our own people we were often fearful in challenging attitudes within our own people; insufficient asking of the question: what have we done or what has our community done that has in any way contributed to The Troubles? Although these and other areas are specific to the Church of Ireland as here articulated, they are, we suggest, also relevant to other sectors of society. Leadership in society, politics and church requires trust, collaboration, energy and vision. Economics of itself will not create a vibrant new society marked by mutuality of understanding and respect of person, place and cultural identity in Northern Ireland.

VIEWS ON ANY LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

- (1) ***Importance of Listening:*** Paramount among lessons to be learned is the recognition that listening to people in the situations in which they find themselves is essential if there is to be understanding of the multi-faceted complexities of why we found ourselves with forty years of The Troubles in the particular cycle of violence in Irish history out of which we are emerging. One could credibly argue that violence and the expectation of violence are woven into Irish history itself. Accepting this and doing something to address it are difficult work which needs to be resourced professionally. It is one component among many, but if it does not happen, however, there will be no meaningful shared future. The document: *A Shared Future* is built on optimism. It also must recognize the prior need for realism and credibility as components in such hopefulness. Sectarianism remains. Racism, violent whether physical or verbal, pervades our society. The agenda of

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Good Relations cannot be played off against an Equality Agenda. An Equality Agenda on its own runs the risk of being rhetorical at best and will be perceived in many parts of this particular society as contrived and imposed social engineering by stealth. Many deeply involved in community relations today feel that Good Relations is being sidelined and priority is being given to the Equality Agenda instead. Equality alone will not address even one of the legacies of forty years of The Troubles: that is the economic waste of enduring sectarianism in Northern Ireland which has been estimated at £1.5 billion.

- (2) **Systemic Confusion:** In a society where religious concepts, religious affiliation and religious language are more prominent than in other parts of the United Kingdom, for example, there has emerged what amounts to a systemic confusion which the Consultative Group will need to address. There is a confusion about the application of technical religious and theological ideas in a secular context. An example may assist in illustrating the problem. Religion makes a causal link between wrong and sin. There follows a chain of events whereby confession flows from a willingness to show repentance in the form of a confession of sin. This opens up the possibility of reconciliation of individuals and groups of people who have hurt and harmed one another. A civic or legal framework deals with wrongdoing in terms of conviction or acquittal. But in popular parlance we often hear the language mixed up. A criminal can be described as ‘breaking down and making a full confession of guilt.’ This is a difficulty as old as the Letters of St Paul and the theology of Tertullian and Augustine. This accumulated tradition has heavily influenced the Latin theological tradition by which both the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Reformation derive are heavily influenced. In a society with a complex past such as ours, it is imperative that the Consultative Group immediately ensure that a group of experts is established to work through this confusion. At its worst, it means that people with a genuine grievance in society can bring to the discussion through their personal expectation the categories of a religious framework of which civil society knows nothing and which it cannot, in conscience, implement.
- (3) **Problem of Segregation:** The question of segregation within and throughout society is a thorny one. It goes to the heart of the human person in that it asks fundamental questions about identity and about being secure in one’s identity. Segregation of any sort, once it is woven into a system, creates a self-protective social psychology. Identity under threat becomes an exclusivity. An exclusivity becomes an intolerance of ‘the other.’ In the worst case scenario, the society as a whole settles for a form of apartheid and those in power hope that nobody will ask any hard questions. If the aspiration of Government remains a shared future within the framework of the document: *A Shared Future*, the Consultative Group will need to make representations which set clearly before decision-makers the recognition now widely held and increasingly articulated that Northern Ireland society is more intensely divided today than heretofore. We return to an earlier suggestion that blind optimism takes us nowhere other than into a cul-de-sac of naivety.

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- (4) ***Inter-Church Progress:*** Often we hear it said that the churches were and are part of the problem. The Church of Ireland is willing to admit that there are things which we did not do well during The Troubles and that there are things which, looking back forty years later, could have been done much better. We also feel that it is correct to pay tribute to the good work which members of the Church of Ireland, lay and clerical, did as we have done in the first section, paragraph (3) of this total submission. It is worth noting that inter-church contact and inter-church co-operation did not die or disappear during the period of The Troubles as many at the time predicted and indeed hoped it would. It is surely ironical that during the period when the churches generally, and the Church of Ireland was no exception, were under such pressure in a situation for which they had no preparation, the idea of churches working together established itself and now in vast parts of the country is seen as a norm.

A clear example of this from 2007 is the presence of Archbishop (now Cardinal) Brady welcomed fully and involved significantly in the enthronement of his Church of Ireland counterpart, Archbishop Harper, in St Patrick's Cathedral Armagh.

The climate was quite different when Archbishop Eames was enthroned twenty-one years earlier in 1986. There are many examples of people of courage confronting caricatures, defying stereotypes, establishing respect for 'the other' and creating community in a climate of multiple and serialized alienation. This ought to give hope and confidence to those still seeking to make a difference in a divided but more peaceful Northern Ireland today and tomorrow. The Consultative Group while remaining properly critical of the contribution of the churches needs also to acknowledge what has been and remains good in that contribution. It will have to work with Christian churches and members of other World Faith communities to build a new and different future if Northern Ireland is to be both critical of itself and mature in such criticism.

SUGGESTIONS ON THE STEPS THAT MIGHT BE TAKEN TO SUPPORT
NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIETY IN BUILDING A SHARED FUTURE THAT
IS NOT OVERSHADOWED BY THE EVENTS OF THE PAST

- (1) ***Enabling Individuals to see the Bigger Picture:*** However optimistic the Consultative Group may be about a shared future as a living definition of society, we need to remind them that there are great dangers in moving from any particular experience to prescriptive generalizations. As well as ‘the intimacy of evil’ to which we referred earlier, there is an intimacy of individual experience as anyone who has ministered to those who are victims of the past forty years will know well. Although many parts of Northern Ireland were outwardly unaffected by The Troubles, there is hardly anyone in the same Northern Ireland who has not been affected either directly or through someone known to them by the events of the past forty years. A more comprehensive availability of trauma counselling is urgently needed for members of the generation which experienced The Troubles as is a thoroughgoing programme of education and sensitization for those who knew nothing directly about them. That includes everyone under ten years old and everyone who has moved to live in Northern Ireland from abroad during the same decade. For many who lived through the conflict, there is an altered mindset. It is such that a particular distorted view of normality which accompanies it should be remembered when dealing with societal change even though it is not necessarily apparent and may cause no immediate difficulties.
- (2) ***Opportunities for Integration:*** Steps need to be taken to offer integration into the new civic society now emerging as the practical manifestation of a shared future in Northern Ireland. This is important if the concept of ‘a shared future’ is to be more than political spin on a theme of social engineering devoid of social capital or moral values. Many criticize the terms of The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement for capitulating too readily to the definition of Northern Ireland as a place of ‘the two communities.’ There are many more communities in Northern Ireland today and people of at least one hundred and fifty nationalities living in the Republic of Ireland. Members of these communities will suffer from alienation and intimidation from within and exploitation by the unscrupulous from outside Northern Ireland if a policy of civic belonging is not put in place. If this does not happen, *A Shared Future* will manifest the immaturities now apparent in The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. Members of the Consultative Group are encouraged to be aware of the value of social capital and also of the part played by the churches in giving a lead in local communities.
- (3) ***Empowering the Electorate:*** Young people need to see good reason to engage with society. Otherwise a chasm of credibility will emerge between a politics built on community division as espoused and expounded over the past forty years and the expectation now laid on today’s generation of politicians. In a very particular way, a peace-savvy electorate will be looking for value for its vote. Foci of celebration, including the upgrading and expansion of community facilities within the context of

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community need, will be needed if the politically apathetic are to be encouraged to become community leaders. Forty years of violence, both sporadic and sustained, have left many people ill-equipped for active peace-making and capacity-building of one another. Archbishop Harper, the Archbishop of Armagh, in his public statements is consistently keen to underwrite this agenda, particularly in areas where Loyalists have historically had the upper hand.

- (4) **Changed Mindset:** Ben Okri, the Nigerian author, writes in *'A way of being free'* that stories are the secret reservoirs of values. Stories need to be told and the courage in so doing needs to be honoured. A model of society based on aggressive economic activity, although important in 'kick-starting' things, will not sustain the society which it creates. In the current difficult period of transition, a future needs to be described and depicted which can draw people forward as they deal with past and present pain. Reconciliation between individuals is essential but so is reconciliation at the level of communities within the society. The Consultative Group needs seriously to reflect upon an agenda very clearly expressed by the German philosopher Hannah Arendt and it is twofold: first the willingness of people to be bound together by promises and agreements and to keep them, thereby creating a moral order together; and secondly the willingness to set aside the past as defined by its vicious cycle of action and reaction and to start anew together in building peace. A legacy such as that of Northern Ireland over the past forty years has, when clinically analyzed, created an altered mindset and a distorted view of normality. Such a reality should be kept in view as a way of understanding why people find difficulty with change in society and why they are often suspicious of people who come serenading them with 'all the answers.'

CONCLUSION

The Church of Ireland, through its members in parishes across the island of Ireland, remains committed to dealing with its own internal legacy of forty years of The Troubles, not only with the purpose of setting its own house in order but determined to make a contribution to a different type of society in Northern Ireland in co-operation with others. This it will do within an all-Ireland church. It is currently seeking to do so by encouraging its members to participate locally in community initiatives where their contribution can make a positive difference by that seemingly simple Christian triad of faith, hope and love. Through The Hard Gospel Project, the Church of Ireland has sought structurally to examine the responsibilities of the 'vertical' relationship in loving God along with the responsibilities of the 'horizontal' relationships in loving our neighbour irrespective of creed, class, gender or ability. We are under neither illusion nor delusion that we can do this on our own. We are, however, willing and ready to play our part. We appreciate this opportunity to make a submission to The Consultative Group on the Past and pledge our willingness to make any further contribution which The Consultative Group may ask of us.