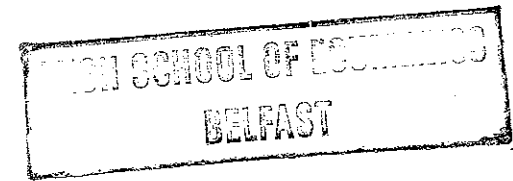


Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland

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Weaknesses in the Churches' Peacemaking

INTRODUCTION

It was not until 1994—the year of the paramilitary ceasefires—that the Presbyterian Church endorsed its 'Peace Vocation' statement, calling on its members to distinguish their faith from their nationalism; the COI's Hard Gospel anti-sectarianism project did not begin until well after the signing of the GFA, and the Catholic Church at the time of writing still has no central peacemaking statement or initiative involving grass-roots members.¹

Being 'behind the times', however, is a vacuous criticism to make with the benefit of hindsight. Rather, in what follows we intend to discuss a range of grievances against the churches' peacemaking that emerged from our interview data and which respondents felt negatively affected their contribution. We then address a series of weaknesses that we attribute to the churches, culminating in what we consider to be the major weakness, the failure to link up other sections of civil society in an integrated and unified peace movement. This enables us to continue our reflection on the opportunities and constraints of civil society peacemaking in settings where civil society is itself part of the problem.

¹ In November 2001 the Catholic Church produced a statement on the value of Catholic education entitled *Building Peace, Shaping the Future* (Catholic Bishops of Ireland, 2001), which came close to providing a public statement in support of peace. That they integrated their statement on peace within a document defending Catholic education indicates their sensitivity to the claim that segregated education contributed to division. In a remarkable development in October 2010, SF's Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness came out in support of segregated education when criticizing the DUP First Minister Peter Robinson for commenting that segregated education created social apartheid. SF have hardly converted to segregated education; it is a further and sad reflection that the traditional principle still holds—'my enemy's enemy is my friend'.

RESPONDENTS' COMPLAINTS

One of the indisputable facts about Northern Ireland is that a population of 1.7 million people has at least the same number of opinions about the roots of the conflict and its potential solutions. At the same time that there have been people who understated their involvement in peacebuilding, others offer opinions more than actions. However, since our interviewees are amongst the central figures in the progressive churches and para-church organizations in Northern Ireland or are members of the main political parties, paramilitary bodies, and civil society groups, their perceptions of the weaknesses of the churches are instructive, offering 'insider accounts' richer than our own. We encountered many complaints. There are almost as many as people interviewed. Some represent real weaknesses that we expand on below; others have been mentioned in earlier chapters or are not worth dwelling on in detail, but we list the major ones for the sake of completeness.

- The churches have often reflected and not challenged a highly sectarian community, making them indistinguishable from society at large.
- Church leaders have often been predictable and verbose, and unable to respond in a timely fashion to both urgent and ongoing need.
- At their worst, churches amplified the fears of the community and did not present a theology of reconciliation and peacebuilding as a normal part of what it means to be a Christian.
- Lack of analysis/risk-taking amongst church leaders.
- There were rarely, if ever, sizeable clusters engaged in active peace work, or of the kind that people could be recruited to as a movement for change in everyday life.
- A vision of the purpose of religion that could transcend political division was made secondary to pastoral care to one's tribe.
- Denial, passivity, by-standing, sometimes as a result of fear of engagement.
- Amongst some Protestants, there was early acquiescence in Loyalist violence, then disengagement.
- Lack of financial, theological, or political commitment to work for peace.
- Focus on individual piety and internal church politics at the expense of underemphasizing sectarianism, neglecting local social issues and forging senses of identity that were inclusive.
- Church structures were not adapted to the requirements of the socio-political crisis.
- Churches did not equip clergy and church members to respond to the situation.

- Churches were often disengaged from the working class.
- Engaging in high-level or political elite—and elitist—activities not grass-roots activism.
- The mainstream church did not challenge Paisley, thereby allowing militant fundamentalism to have an influence vastly disproportionate to its numbers.
- Not challenging congregations to act beyond their self-interest or working with their congregations to encourage personal commitments to peacemaking.
- No development of a radical movement for peace.
- Equating the conflict with broken relationships alone led to misdiagnosing the problem, so inter-church worship was used far too often as a bandage on conflicts that were far deeper than can be resolved through ecumenism.
- A sense of abandonment felt by (some) victims against churches that did not attend to their needs.

While this list appears rather long, when unpicked it reveals considerable concord. It is plain that chief amongst the grievances is the view that Northern Ireland's churches reflected the society in which they functioned. The Revd Norman Hamilton, later to become Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, put this succinctly: 'Historically the thing that has disappointed me most is that the Protestant church leaders have not articulated the needs, the hopes, and the fears of the Catholic, Republican, and Nationalist constituency. If I can say so, the same applies to the senior Catholic clergy: you have not articulated to your people the fears, the hopes, and the needs of the Unionist community. So, all we have done is to mirror the politics of our own community. I think that has been a serious and damaging weakness' (interview 26 January 2006).² In one sense this is inevitable because churches are part of the institutional structure of society, operate within the framework of laws that mark the state, and comprise members and believers who are embedded in local cultural beliefs and values. This grievance, however, articulates more the idea that we could have expected something different from churches. Where the churches' social and political location is dramatically at odds with their principles and ethos, they should offer a critique of society rather than mirror it. Rather than positioning themselves on a moral high ground, however, leading society forward with a vision from the privileged heights, Northern Ireland's churches sunk in its morasses, leaving relatively few individual churchmen and women,

² As an illustration of the constraints operating on the holders of the office of moderator, despite these views, and a courageous history in standing up against Loyalists to defend Catholic schoolchildren in the Holy Cross incident, Hamilton declined to shake the hand of the Pope when he visited London in 2010, although he did agree to meet him.

mostly mavericks and independents outside the control of conservative and cautious hierarchies, to struggle to pull themselves up above the mire. This complaint has a number of constituent elements.

At their worst, churches simply reinforced the terms of the conflict. By endorsing and nurturing the equation of religion with ethno-national identity—from matters as ostensibly trivial as Irish dancing in Catholic churches to barn dances in Protestant ones—they reinforced cultural exclusivity. By the trappings of flags and emblems inside the respective denominations, such as paramilitary funerals or regimental standards and Boys/Girls Brigade emblems, churches displayed the colours of their loyalties, no matter how ambivalent some individual clergy were about them (see Vignette 11). The larger churches never engaged in a systematic or credible challenge to religious

Vignette 11: Extracts from the interview with Bishop Edward Daly, 24 January 2006

The whole funeral culture was very difficult, the whole paramilitary funerals, it was a point of enormous sensitivity both for church and for people and caused quite a lot of confrontation here in Derry. It caused huge confrontation between myself and the Provos [Provisional IRA]. You talk about the church being used. I mean at that time everyone used the funerals to gain publicity. You had a situation where you had a young priest somewhere out in [name deleted] and he was confronted with this funeral of some young person from this parish who turned out to be in the Provos and was shot by the SAS or something, and you had this massive funeral with Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness and all the luminaries of Sinn Féin arriving with flags and coffins and bands and shots being fired; with about four or five television crews banging on his door night and day for the forty-eight hours beforehand; with families who were grieving and the whole circus there; with the police guarding or surrounding the place, army surrounding the place to make sure that shots weren't fired. And he was caught in the maelstrom and then half an hour after the funeral everybody was gone, he was left with the grieving family and the people in the parish round him and that was extraordinarily difficult. I found myself a lot of times, working with priests who found themselves in that situation, spending maybe two or three days before a funeral with them, they'd dread it and it's something that nobody could have prepared anybody for, you know, that sort of situation. So, and he was left subsequently to pick up the pieces afterwards. And in some cases, too, you had a family who were split, some brothers in the family supported the Provos, others didn't want to, some wanted a flag on the coffin, some didn't, some wanted a military funeral, some didn't. And you went on and you had to be very careful what you said because what you said was simply taken and analysed and maybe sometimes taken completely out of context. Conflict in one's own community is extraordinarily difficult to deal with. You can comment away on things in other parts of the border when you're nice and in an armchair, but when you are sitting in the eye of the conflict it's extraordinarily difficult to think on your feet.

extremists, who always punched politically above the weight of their congregational numbers. Paisleyism was more than a person, it was a way of thinking and Christian politeness towards the man often inhibited attacking the system he once embodied.

The flip side of the denominational diversity in Northern Ireland (with more than fifty indigenous denominations) is a disunited church. Protestantism is internally schismatic (Bruce, 1990) and the Catholic Church had its internal strife over policy and practice, including towards involvement in active peace. But there was disunity on another level. No one could agree on the reasons for the conflict, nor its solutions.

The voices calling for a peace vision were drowned; and not only by the extremists. The progressive churches shouted across each other. What was missing therefore was leadership of a peace movement inside the churches that could be projected outwards into society generally. Clergy have often appeared to see themselves as 'managers' rather than leaders. They felt inhibited from challenging their congregations. And among those in leadership positions, there was a culture, both in politics and church authority, that bishops, moderators, and presidents saw themselves as committee chairs rather than prophetic leaders, seeking consensus rather than setting the pace for change. They criticized violence, and its perpetrators, but gave little prophetic leadership by moving society beyond condemnation, agreeing around negative peace but divided by positive peace. As Fr Des Wilson said, so wonderfully astutely, 'it always seemed to me that what the churches were looking for was peace without change' (interview 9 November 2005).

Lying behind this grievance, in its many formulations, is the idea also that church leaders misdiagnosed both the problem and the solution. Emphasizing only the relational dimensions of the conflict, ecumenical worship services were overstated as potential peacemaking solutions by bringing (some) people together. While 'proper relationships' are important to positive peace, the conflict was also about social injustice, economic disparity, and unequal life chances (for working-class Protestants as much as Catholics). Social transformation is part of the solution as much as relational togetherness. Positive peace, as far as the churches were concerned, would have involved them messing about in local communities with hands dirty from practising social witness. Their neglect of this dimension goes hand in hand with church leaders avoiding grass-roots activism in preference for high-level and elite engagements. It is consistent with clergy extolling personal piety on their congregations rather than commitments to social transformation.

All this is summed up perhaps as a lack of critical self-reflection within the churches as institutions. The ecumenist movement was smug in not exposing to criticism its grounding assumption that relationship-building would eventually break down all barriers; and the mainstream churches were sluggishly comfortable in restricting themselves to engaging with people just like

themselves. In class terms this meant the suburban, 'polite' middle classes, in theological terms the liberals, leaving working-class communities and fundamentalists adrift, both thought of as sunk in sectarianism, 'people not like us'. This lack of reflexivity meant, above all, that most religious peacemakers could not see the mote in others' eyes for the beam in their own. They did not critique sectarian society, they reproduced it; mostly unintentionally, it has to be said, and without realizing this was the case given the uncritical view of themselves as leading the charge against it (a point which Garrigan, 2010, makes forcibly).³ Mavericks and independents, on the other hand, used to mediating their way through hierarchical controls and restrictions and with imagination and initiative to find ways to engage with the social and political peace processes regardless of institutional constraints, were forced by this circumstance to be reflexive; it was the only way they could protect themselves within church bureaucracies. Their insecurity tended to militate against sloth and smugness.

WEAKNESSES AND CHALLENGES

In this section, we want to build on respondents' complaints to develop an argument that the churches' religious peacemaking was constrained by a series of weaknesses and challenges that as institutions they could not surmount, leaving key individuals to mediate their own personal way around them. This had the effect of individualizing the churches' contribution to peace. Some of these weaknesses are familiar from the above analysis and, where this is so, we are able to elaborate and provide extracts from the data in support.

1: A disunited church

Northern Ireland's churches are just that: churches, with a myriad of distinct approaches and differences. There has never been a fully unified approach amongst the churches to addressing conflict. The Revd David Armstrong voiced the opinion that in fact the churches were 'very pleased with the division in society because it made them able to rein in [their] own people'; they feared that a coming together would 'cause a certain amount of power to be lost' as institutions (interview 2 December 2005). Indeed, when the Roll of Northern Irish Christian peacemakers is read, most of the names are likely to be less known to the general public, as these tended to be low-profile, even

³ The Catholic Church's persistent support for segregated education, however, does not qualify to be excused under this generosity caveat.

maverick figures, whose peace engagements meant that they were unlikely to rise to senior leadership positions in churches that preferred more cautious approaches. These people are well known locally, of course, for in getting close to the paramilitaries and their communities, strong reputations became rooted in their own neighbourhoods, although a few rose to such prominence that they transcended this localism. In a setting where peace work marginalized them from their leaders, especially in the beginning, women religious peacemakers were doubly suspect. As the Revd Ruth Patterson remarked, 'to be seen as an ordained woman and as someone involved in reconciliation was anathema to a lot of my male brothers within the Presbyterian tradition' (interview 29 November 2005).

There are various levels of disunity, however. The most obvious is between the pro- and anti-peace churches. The very ideology promoted by some churches (such as the FPC) actually reinforced the perception of the civil conflict as being religious in nature. David Porter, ECONI Director, put it as follows in interview on 24 September 2007: 'You are told the Catholic Church is the antichrist, that no Catholic can really be a Christian. You are being taught on a regular basis of the political threat of Romanism, of the antichrist as the big system that is going to control the world before Jesus comes again. How can you be taught that week in and week out and then sit down and make peace with your Catholic neighbour on a Monday?' The history of bigotry was on all sides, however. Cardinal O'Fiaich was fond of remarking that 'the Protestant people are 90 per cent religious bigots and the Catholic population are 90 per cent political bigots'. In telling us this tale, Fr Denis Faul went on to comment, 'that's something to quell you know, this clash between the two types of bigot' (interview 23 January 2006). The residual anti-Catholicism in mainstream Protestantism (on which see Brewer and Higgins, 1998) was matched by Catholic self-righteousness, 'smugness' as the SDLP Sean Farren termed it (interview 27 May 2007), as privileged possessors of religious truth.

One of our respondents who asked for the following comment to be unattributed, which is itself a reflection of the divisiveness in the church, was very perceptive in drawing comparison with the prophetic leadership of the civil rights movement in the USA shown by some churches:

I think [there are] church politicians who [are] faultless in [their] capacities for diplomacy and at times the focus on keeping [their] own church together limited [their] ability to take the risks that are necessary to be celebrated as a peacemaker. Martin Luther King wasn't worried about holding his congregation together when he walked down a street or when he led a thousand people. The difference here is Martin Luther King didn't have a denomination which had some people who were in favour of segregation and he didn't have to try and hold the segregationists together with the integrationists. I went to a theological college that didn't even have a module looking at the theology of conflict, and there was no reconciliation training. This was after the peace process, this was

1998, and there still wasn't something like that in place. They were arguing about seventeenth-century theological disputes. (Interview date deleted)

But even those leaders in the progressive churches who might otherwise have incarnated a truly risk-taking vocation for peace, were frequently opposed from within their own denominations. Very broad political divisions could be represented even within congregations and there were a myriad of subtler distinctions over strategy and objective that separated people who shared a commitment to change. Silence or apathy became a management strategy to contain congregational conflicts as a priority over confronting societal conflict. As Cecelia Clegg said in interview on 29 November 2007: 'A sin of omission, which relates mostly to the Catholic Church, is that there were very few occasions on which the clergy got together and had a chance to talk about what was actually going on. In the Derry diocese, I was never able to verify it, but several people told me that there had not been a single meeting of the clergy in which the situation had been discussed in the first twenty-five years of "the Troubles"'. It is worth noting in support of the argument that there were significant differences between the Belfast and Derry Catholic dioceses caused largely by personnel. Bishop Edward Daly in Derry was a very active grass-roots peace practitioner; Cahal Daly in Belfast was not. This affected the respective engagements of the church leaders with SF, but had the opposite effect on ordinary priests. Cahal Daly's disengagement gave impetus in Belfast to ordinary clergy striking out on their own, Edward Daly's contacts made it unnecessary in Derry.

Disagreement over strategy and practice amongst progressive churches, however, is not what we mean here, for there was genuine disunity. The paradox of ecumenism is that while it reflected an important unity amongst practitioners, it restricted itself to other ecumenists and was itself a source of disunity. It provoked considerable opposition within the mainstream Protestant churches (many of whom continued to look over their shoulder at the menaces from Paisley and the Loyal Orders, as well as fundamentalist mission halls and organizations), and was an obstacle to developing meaningful relationships with peace activists in the liberal-evangelical tradition. ECONI was the only route for ecumenists to link with evangelicals. But the disunity went further. Peace initiatives, ironically, tended to be carried out on a denominationally exclusive basis, with one notable but indicative example being the Presbyterian Youth for Peace project established in 2000, which omitted any obligation for contact with Catholic youth, as this was considered too controversial to be approved by the General Assembly. Outside ecumenism, the Faith in a Brighter Future group was perhaps the only initiative that was genuinely interdenominational.

As another example, the boundaries of trust required for highly sensitive backchannel communication were often narrowly construed in denominational

terms and participants were restricted to small groups within the one denomination. As secret activities, the duplication between denominationally competing backchannel initiatives only came to light afterwards. Fr Denis Faul recalled the overlap in efforts to bring about a ceasefire at the time of the 1974 Feakle talks between Protestant clergy and the IRA: 'There [were] two efforts made by me and a few priests to bring about a ceasefire, but they wouldn't listen to you. It was around about the time of the Feakle thing'. The Revd William Arlow was the unofficial leader of the Protestant clergy involved in the Feakle talks and when asked whether Faul was aware of what Arlow was doing and vice versa, Fr Faul replied, 'No, No'. When the interviewer put to him that the initiatives were run separately, Faul went on, 'oh, completely. All the time you have the split and you have two different groups' (interview 23 January 2006).

There was an element of covetousness and competition involved on top of the confidentiality. There is direct evidence that the Faith in a Brighter Future initiative was briefed against by the leader of a para-church organization that was well known for running initiatives of its own. This briefing included potentially dangerous bad-mouthing of the facilitators to SF—'mischievous' was how Monsignor Tom Toner referred to them in conversation with Francis Teeney at the big SF funeral for Jimmy Drumm. Toner revealed that the matter had been discussed as high in SF as Gerry Kelly. The Revd John Dunlop referred to the counterproductive effects of this denominationalism when interviewed on 23 March 2006: 'You find individual people will do very significant things whereas the total corporate body may not themselves be able to go as far as some individuals would be able to go. The danger is that you get a very strong attitude of "ourselves alone", ourselves alone as Republicans, ourselves alone as Unionists, ourselves alone as Presbyterians, ourselves alone as Methodists, ourselves alone as Catholics. But ourselves alone won't work because God never meant us to work in a way that is essentially divisive, inward looking, selfish.'

2: Clergy as 'managers'

The role of clergy as representatives of their own denomination is noteworthy as an instance of disunity across these religious boundaries. It reflects another major weakness, however, with respect to prophetic leadership. Many clergy felt constrained by their congregations and did not speak out about sensitive topics. The shift towards a morally conservative agenda noticeable amongst evangelicals (for example Ganiel, 2008a) was not just premised on post-GFA realities, where political preaching became problematic, nor was it restricted to evangelicals. A dose of hell fire and damnation about moral looseness was the stock in trade of many a Sunday, irrespective of denomination, well before the political peace process delivered agreement. Indeed, criticizing moral

looseness was safe in a way that praying for political agreement was not. Suppressing political and other fissures within their congregations marked the managerial aim of many clergy, whether with respect to the tensions wrought by the hunger strikes and paramilitary-style funerals, or Remembrance Sunday and Orange Order services. This view of the clergy's role as manager could be used to disguise political preferences that otherwise could not be publicly revealed, both for and against the peace process. Those 'clergy managers' who otherwise withdrew reluctantly from peacemaking tended to lionize the mavericks and treated them as the 'conscience' of their denominations.

This kind of clergy manager provided a considerable degree of moral support to others' peacemaking, often turned up at meetings, swelled the audiences measurably and voiced enthusiasm (especially when their own congregations could be kept in the dark), and were the mavericks' strongest supporters, pushing them forward from behind. Sometimes done from fear of putting themselves in the position of advance guard, or caution at working without the imprimatur of the senior leadership, preference for this role also reflected their realization that parish clergy had daily responsibilities in the church bureaucracy and for the pastoral needs of parishioners. Brother David Jardine explained the problem facing clergy managers: 'Clergy are so busy in their parishes that it's very hard to spend a lot of time working outside, and sometimes if you neglect visitation of people within the parish to spend time working outside, you're going to have to face a lot of criticism' (interview 6 December 2007). And it is the case that the mavericks and independents were on the whole free of parish chores and had opportunities for peace work that clergy managers lacked. The religious peacemakers themselves often failed to recognize the advantages of their institutional location. Dr Cecelia Clegg, for example, noted that churches have always been 'preoccupied with church life and issues', seeing it as easy enough for other clergy 'to clear their diaries so there was some space for inter-community meetings and things' (interview 29 November 2007).

It is ironic that parish management should be a constraint with Catholicism, since Vatican II was supposed to bring in the laity to do these things, but Irish bishops, and indeed some parish priests, resisted this for fear of diluting their authority. Preference for the role of manager not only measured people's (varying) inability to transcend the tyranny of the diary, it sometimes reflected also the advice of their church leaders to avoid peace work, whose displeasure they feared. Displeasure could grow into real threat when presbyteries, bishops, or other leaders could remove someone's capacity to preach and with it perhaps house and home. The real weakness with the role of clergy manager, therefore, at least for those for whom it was a genuine constraint on their peacemaking rather than a disguise for inactivity, was the slow recognition on the part of the institutional churches to establish a large cadre of skilled

activists with the bureaucratic space and time to become specialists in peace. The journalist Malachi O'Doherty said when asked what he would do now if we could return to the start of 'the Troubles': 'what I would have done in the churches, I would have singled out your most eloquent people and said your job is going to be to make the case against violence and hypocrisy by whomever and you're going to be really good at it you're going to study this and you're going to be dedicated to this and this is what you're going to do' (interview 4 September 2007).

3: Fear, real and perceived, including the fear of 'losing your people'

Clergy and grass-roots Christians alike were sometimes legitimately afraid of involvement in peacemaking. It may be entirely reasonable to be anxious about what might happen if you 'put your head above the parapet'; sometimes not. Suburban sensibilities sometimes caused fear. The Revd Gary Mason often complained with respect to participation in the social peace process that some clergy were fearful of social witness since it involved mixing with working-class people in ghetto-like estates where the paramilitaries held strong command and which were subject to high levels of antisocial behaviour, crime, and drugs. 'We are taught well, in inverted commas, to pastor congregations, to preach sermons but there is a major weakness as regard the whole thesis of engaging with civic society and social holiness' (interview 14 February 2006). This caused a distance between most Protestant clergy and Loyalists in working-class areas that was never matched by priests in working-class Catholic estates. As Loyalist community worker Billy Hutchinson said of the Protestant churches, 'I suppose they didn't understand what was going on in working-class communities, they didn't understand the fear issues and they didn't understand why people were in paramilitary organizations. I think that was because what they were interested in was people's spiritual side rather than the whole notion of how we deal with conflict and all the rest of it' (interview 26 September 2007).

Involvement in the political peace process, however, brought more dangerous fears. Some clergy and church workers suffered genuine intimidation—bullets in the post, threatening phone calls, abusive letters, and threats to burn churches (sometimes carried out). As the Revd Lesley Carroll remarked, 'those were scary days' (interview 10 January 2008). It was not just the range of threats that provoked fear but, as Robin Eames said, it was knowing that paramilitaries had a mindset that gave them permission to carry them out (interview 29 January 2008). Protestant clergy were always the more vulnerable; the IRA considered attacks on clergy beyond the pale in a way that Loyalist

paramilitaries never did, and Protestant parochial houses mostly had husbands, wives, and children living there, to add to the level of fear. The Revd David Armstrong remembered an occasion: 'The police called saying, will you lie low tonight, we believe that your life is in danger, and I can remember people putting away their guitars and coming over and shaking my hand and saying, "David and June we'll be praying for you", or even people coming a big a distance to present us with copies of Bonhoeffer [Dietrich, theologian executed by the Nazis], leather-bound copies. But when Police Inspector [name deleted] arrived and said "I'm afraid your life today may be in danger would you please, please be careful", my wife brought the tray of tea in and sandwiches, she said, "where are the men with the Bonhoeffer books?" I said, "love if you look out the window you can see them running across the field as fast as their legs will carry them"' (interview 2 December 2005).

SF realized the peculiar problems facing the Protestant clergy with whom they were having secret meetings: 'You know, it's a difference in attitude. For them to go back into their community and say listen, we were meeting with Shinnars [Sinn Féin], it would be ah, traitor, you know, Lundys, all that' (Denis Donaldson, interview 14 November 2005). The Revd Harold Good described this in interview on 24 January 2006: 'I was getting people phoning up, I've still got some of the nasty letters somewhere, [saying] I had betrayed the Protestant people, let down the Protestant people. Then I came home the next afternoon and there was a petrol bomb sitting in the middle of our back yard in [name deleted] where we lived, somebody had put this petrol bomb. So I packed my wife and kids off down to Granny's, down the country, you know and said, you go away and have a bit of a holiday and leave me to get on with my work and I won't have to worry about your health and safety.' He said that his anxiety was not whether his activities put him in danger but whether or not they put his ultimate goal of peace at risk.

Sometimes there was fear of being too far ahead of their congregations and in saying and doing unpopular things that risked splitting the congregation. Some things Catholic priests did not speak up about, Fr Denis Faul said, 'because, basically, I suppose they were afraid of splitting their parish' (interview 23 January 2006). The Presbyterian minister Ken Newell lived a ministry of great courage in his work at Fitzroy Church in South Belfast but explained, 'it is also a very risky thing because you move into the whole prophetic area, and have to say things to challenge your own people in the community' (interview 20 September 2005). Low levels of personal courage interacted with a manager mentality to persuade some clergy that the mavericks, such as Newell, should do all the pushing, pulling, and heavy lifting.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that use of 'fear-language' by some clergy was an excuse for not being involved. Sometimes the 'fears' were not real or were exaggerated as part of the ongoing cliché in Northern Ireland

that 'whatever you say, say nothing'.⁴ But personal courage is a necessity for religious peace work when religion is part of the problem. Bishop Samuel Poyntz said on one occasion about receiving a bullet through the post: 'On it was printed, "the next one's for you", that's all, but I mean, I never worried about it, I never worried about it in the least, I didn't even tell my family' (interview 23 September 2005). It might be thought simplistic, but it can be argued that while Catholic priests feared their cardinal rather than the IRA, at least in Belfast, and in effect had nothing serious to worry about from their own community,⁵ Protestant peacemakers faced more benign church hierarchies but a murderous threat from Loyalists.

4. Misdiagnosing the problem

There are two particular dimensions to this challenge: the failure of the churches to acknowledge the *religious* dimension to the conflict in Northern Ireland, thus failing to address robustly the problem of sectarianism and their own contribution to it; and their narrow emphasis on the relational dimensions of division between Catholics and Protestants rather than on the structural and systemic features of conflict.

The debate about whether or not Northern Ireland's conflict was religious (summarized well in Barnes, 2005; Mitchell, 2006) misrepresents it for it was both religious and not religious; there was much more to 'the Troubles' than theology, but it was in part experienced as a religious conflict because of the boundaries of the groups involved and the deployment *inter alia* of religious discourses to understand it in lay terms. Paradoxically, the progressive churches sought to underplay the religious elements of the conflict, in part because they wished to distance themselves from religious extremists who emphasized it and also to avoid the self-realization that they helped contribute to it. This neglect revealed itself in the avoidance of any discussions in the churches about sectarianism until the period of the ceasefires, when the political peace process was coming to fulfilment, and unwillingness even then to analyse and confront the religious contributions to it, such as through patterns of worship, the scriptural texts used in sermons, hymnody, and religious rituals generally (see Garrigan, 2010, for elaboration of this point). And while discussions of sectarianism were initiated in the churches in the 1990s, they were primarily led by ISE and suffered from ecumenism's

⁴ This is taken from a famous poem by Seamus Heaney 'Whatever you Say, Say Nothing', published in 1975 as part of the anthology *North*, and immortalized in song as a caricature by Colum Sands in his 1981 album *Unapproved Road*. It finds its parallel in another popular euphemism in Northern Ireland 'see no evil, hear no evil', which Knox (2002) made the title of a paper on public reactions to paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland.

⁵ Several Catholic priests were attacked by Loyalists and had churches burned.

marginalization both from the mainstream churches and the grass roots, and proved very difficult to embed in either. It is worth noting here that the COI's anti-sectarian project was disguised under the label 'Hard Gospel' and based in Derry, a Catholic majority city, although it had an office in Belfast.

The 'problem' was perceived by most religious peacemakers to be political violence itself rather than religion, such that the solution became negative peace—the cessation of violence. Bishop Alan Harper, later to become Anglican primate, admitted, 'the church was attempting to distance itself from the conflict in Northern Ireland, and still does to a degree, by siding with those who argue that this is, first and foremost, a political issue and not a religious issue' (interview 25 January 2006). When the conflict was more broadly understood, the violence itself was located in a very limited backcloth, namely the constitutional question and the separate identities that were thought to lay behind this, rather than social structural factors that cause it, such as unemployment, poverty, bad housing, poor education, and local subcultures of violence. Galtung (1969; also see Ho, 2007) calls this 'structural violence' and sees its solution as positive peace—the (re)introduction of fairness, justice, equality of opportunity, and social redistribution. The emphasis on the separate 'conflicting' identities of Catholics and Protestants rather than systemic or structural violence led to an inevitable focus on 'proper relationships' between what appeared as the warring groups. The disadvantaged structural position of working-class Loyalists thus went by neglect. Ecumenism was as much at fault here as mainstream Protestant churches, preferring instead to focus on building bridges between middle-class people like themselves. This is precisely why evangelicals got interested in the peace process in the first place, by trying to respond to the needs of working-class Loyalist neighbourhoods affected by the violence and its structural causes.

The emphasis on 'proper relationships' meant that 'reconciliation' was the mantra not social justice, social redistribution, fairness, and equality, wherever they were found wanting, including in Loyalist ghettos. We are not suggesting that an emphasis on social justice would have found any greater grounds for unity amongst working-class Loyalist and Republican groups. No matter how socially deprived, Loyalists did not like Catholics getting a larger slice than they of social justice. But as a basic Christian principle, preaching social justice rather than relational togetherness might have fostered greater unity *amongst the churches*. ECONI's seminar programme on social justice, that included talks on policing, human rights, and the like, only served to further isolate this para-church body from the mainstream. The focus on reconciliation, however, was divisive, for as Garrigan (2010: 48) outlines, it meant different things across the denominations based on how they understood sin and salvation.

The term 'reconciliation' was controversial in Presbyterian circles until relatively recent times and evangelicals within the mainstream churches and outside sought to monopolize the word as a purely theological term referring

to the role Christ plays in reconciling people to God. They assumed that political and social reconciliation could be the consequence only of widespread evangelical conversion, as only the 'saved' could be reconciled with each other. They therefore focused exclusively on what they called 'preaching the gospel'—which in practice meant a pietistic personal Protestant morality that actually reinforced the religious-ethnic boundaries of Northern Irish society.

By conflating evangelical spirituality with the trappings of Ulster Protestantism, sincere Christian people ended up fuelling the conflict through their own evangelism by reinforcing the identification of Protestantism with land, nation, and Union, 'for God and Ulster'. Understating his point significantly, former SF Mayor of Belfast Tom Hartley said: 'I would have thought churches are open to criticism when they associate with one particular view of history and one particular view of the conflict' (interview 2 February 2006). Insiders in the churches admitted the same. Cecelia Clegg said, 'I suppose that was the biggest problem, people let their political or national identities affect their religious identity and the demands of the gospel' (interview 29 November 2007). The Revd Charles Kenny put it this way: the churches 'tended to act as chaplains to a particular tribe and that is the great tragedy of it all' (interview 14 September 2005).

Therefore, while Bishop Harold Miller is absolutely correct to observe that many Protestants saw churches as havens during the violence, as places of quiet calm no matter how fleetingly (interview 25 January 2006), this made churches places of retreat and escape, where difficult and challenging confrontations with religious-ethnic boundaries was avoided by default. A critic of the churches, Dawn Purvis, who was at the time of her interview leader of the PUP, commented: 'I found the churches very closed, not ignorant of the conflict but really a sense of "we provide a spiritual haven for our members". It was nearly a separation [from] all the bad things that were going on. That's the [problem with] exclusive Christianity' (interview 11 September 2007). The journalist and broadcaster Malachi O'Doherty agreed: 'I think they were full of pious humbug a lot of the time. I think they were afraid, they didn't want to involve themselves much in "the Troubles", except for a few who did so constructively' (interview 4 September 2007).

Northern Irish religious peacemaking therefore offers an excellent illustration of Turner's (2009: 254–61) argument that piety (what he calls 'pietization') is strangely problematic for churches. When churches are faced with social division and have the subsequent responsibility to assist in civic repair, piety increases the cohesion of the religious group and meets their requirement for righteousness, but carries social exclusion that inhibits empathy with less or non pious 'others', including even when they have been subject to mass atrocity. This is not necessarily by deliberate design but by dint of concentration on personal piety as the religious goal. The Revd Harold Good, for example, was aware of the danger: 'What I'm saying is [that] we've been so

concentrating on getting ourselves saved and spreading the faith and sharing our witness that we've never really actually sat down to think what does all this mean [for society]. We've got to be painting the [peace] vision' (interview 24 January 2006).⁶

The paradox was that even for those religious peacemakers who challenged the churches about sectarianism, such as Harold Miller, or called for a peace vision, such as Harold Good, rendered the solution to be cross-community relationship-building at the personal level. Ecumenism's major strength was simultaneously its greatest weakness, for while it laid bare the dynamics that nurtured religious sectarianism, it was constrained by the emphasis on improving relations between individual Catholics and Protestants. Thus, one of the chief champions of anti-sectarianism inside the churches, Cecelia Clegg, said in interview: 'I believe in the power of prayer. But it wasn't prayer we needed. It was real communication and real relationship and a real willingness to take chances together' (29 November 2007). Indeed—and much more besides. The journalist and commentator, William Crawley, ordained a Presbyterian minister but now post-Christian and strongly critical of the churches, said that this misdiagnosis is no more than we should have expected: 'If you have a theology overwhelmingly that is about personal righteousness rather than social reconciliation don't be surprised then that the ministers produced by that church and that theological context are people who inhabit that world and embody that kind of limited perspective' (interview 23 September 2007). Advocates of social witness who were themselves addressing the problem of sectarianism but from outside ecumenism, such as the Revd Earl Storey, were equally trenchant: 'How can a church express Christian faith and not address sectarianism? The churches' contribution, the gospel's contribution, has got to be much more incisive, much more proactive than just condemnation' (interview 21 September 2005). Alf McCreary, a religious journalist, saw the blame for this lying in the sorts of people who were attracted to join the clergy and their inadequate training in preaching social witness: 'A lot of young priests that I know come from fairly sheltered backgrounds; and the theological training they get would not challenge them to think anyway radically about social justice as it affects the North of Ireland' (interview 25 September 2007).

⁶ The irony is that many of the great social reformers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were evangelicals, but evangelicalism in the early twentieth century took against the social gospel since its emergence coincided with the growth of theological liberalism and the loss of confidence in the scriptures as an authoritative source of faith and practice, the downgrading of understanding of the cross, and the need for redemption, repentance, and forgiveness. So evangelicals resisted the social gospel not because of its social content but its association with what they saw as the abandonment of certain theological truth claims. We owe this insight to David Porter in interview on 27 February 2006.

Robin Eames, in a remarkable admission after he had retired as primate of the COI, when asked to name one thing that he would have done differently, replied that it would be 'to get more Protestants, Unionists, [and] Church of Ireland to accept that long before "the Troubles" there was great injustice in the Catholic community' (interview 29 January 2008).⁷ SF's Jim Gibney agreed with this view: 'The mainstream churches failed to deal with the issues which were part of the conflict. They had people who would have known the extent of the injustices that led to the conflict' (interview 25 September 2007). When the follow-up question was put to Eames on what he would recommend to clergy and churchgoers today, he was forceful: 'Come out of your pulpits, come out of your sanctuaries, come out of your comfortable pews and recognize that the way you live, the people you talk to, and the way you talk to them [should be] made relevant and stop wasting so much time on irrelevancies.'

Not only Protestant clergy suffered from narrowness of perspective. Fr Denis Faul admitted in interview on 9 November 2005 that, 'yeah, well, very early on we were under the mistaken impression that the major problem was one of relationships between people and therefore if you maximize the coming together of people, of all kinds of shapes and sizes talking to each other, you would help to solve the problems'. He later came to the recognition, he said, that this 'wouldn't actually solve problems unless at the same time you had some mechanism whereby you dissolved the power of the various organizations that split people apart'. Many would include the churches as one of those institutions.

5: The role of mistrust

If truth is the first casualty of conflict, trust is close behind. Mistrust was unbounded in 'the Troubles' and the churches are hardly to blame for that, even though they might have spoken more volubly against it. Eric Smyth, a Protestant pastor who resigned from the DUP over Paisley's support for power-sharing, was reputed to be fond of saying that while he did not know what his opponents were talking about, he was against it anyway. However, for every ten like Smyth inside the churches, for whom mistrust was their watchword, there was perhaps one or two who, through back-channel communications, for example, did all they could to build trust. Trust not mistrust was their moral assumption. We therefore mean

⁷ It is worth noting that the defining feature of most Unionist politicians was to deny allegations of injustice towards Catholics, any intimation of which was sufficient to lead to the accusation of being Republican and in favour of terrorism, as happened on one occasion to Teeney. Some Unionist politicians hold fast to this view today.

something quite specific by our criticism here: namely, the failure of the churches to trust *each other* in the very backchannel peacemaking by which trust was garnered. The suspicious, suspect 'other', whom faith commitments should have made churches open towards, was as much the marginalized 'insider' from within the churches. Suspicion amongst excluded churchmen and women about secret dialogue encouraged denominationalism, as sense of trusting ourselves alone, and reproduced the political divisions of the wider society inside the churches.

The failure to trust each other meant the churches offered no lead in the public sphere to encourage ordinary people to abandon mistrust. The late Revd John Morrow, one of the original founders of Corrymeela, illustrated this point well. Referring to clergy involved in secret talks, he said: 'some members found it difficult to carry on in the light of events which they felt somehow or other the people they were talking to bore some responsibility for. They [the talks] were fairly private because some sections of the church didn't agree with them and therefore we didn't go around [emphasizing them] publicly. There was always a danger, we were always risking to some extent actually causing further divisions within our own churches by what we were doing because it was disapproved of that we should be talking to people who were regarded simply as murderers. We didn't feel that that was a justifiable reason for not having contact' (interview 7 December 2005).

Part of this mistrust was politically motivated, describing people's fears over the possible outcome. Marginalized insiders were sometimes accused of being duped, of believing the 'mistruths' they were being fed by devious interlocutors, of going 'native'. Interestingly, it was Catholic priests who tended to be accused of going Republican, never Protestant clergy of going Loyalist, a reflection of where these sorts of criticisms emanated from rather than observed fact.⁸ Looking at the situation from outside the churches, the journalist Brian Rowan, who specialized in security issues, felt that 'the secrecy of all of this stuff suggests to people, well it is wrong. When it's out in the open people begin to think it's more right, and I think that was part of the problem, it was not a properly managed process' (interview 4 April 2006). This fails to recognize that no one else was doing this sort of peace work and the churches could do it best because of the special qualities of sacred space that associate it with confidentiality. Another element to the mistrust of each other, therefore, was the sense that secrecy corrupts, an irony given the large number of

⁸ To SF, it appeared that many Protestant clergy were immersed in these loyalties anyway. In interview with Jim Gibney, one of SF's leadership team responsible for developing contacts with Protestant clergy, he said 'without naming any individuals, we talked at length to them [Protestant clergy] about the scale of collusion, for example, between the state forces and Loyalist paramilitaries in the killing of Catholics, not only did they not want to believe it they did not believe it. And it was not about not wanting to believe it: they just refused to accept it' (interview 25 September 2007).

Protestant ministers suspected of membership of the Masonic Order.⁹ There is a deep irony here. Some religious peacebuilders helped garner trust but were mistrusted by their colleagues for doing so. It is in this sense that the churches contributed to the problem of mistrust.

6: Self-aggrandizement and the battle for credit

There is a paradox with secrecy that has gone unrecognized in the usual complaints against it. The backchannel facilitators within the churches were mostly quiet people who preferred being out of the public limelight—many still are reluctant to talk about their activities and tend to be self-deprecating when doing so, avoiding aggrandizement. However, their critics were mostly much more at ease in the public gaze and were better suited to making public statements of condemnation—of violence, the paramilitaries, and, occasionally, of secrecy itself. We do not wish to suggest that public statements were intentional means to self-aggrandizement but they had the effect of raising the person's profile and their importance in the media, increasing their visibility, and, if the dash of rhetorical condemnation was flamboyant enough, they became regular commentators, readily and routinely asked for public statements. Dawn Purvis, who resigned as leader of the PUP as a result of the UVF's breach of its ceasefire by murdering Bobby Moffett in 2010, and someone critical of the progressive churches' failure to stand up to Paisleyism, was dismissive of such grandstanding: 'I think there are [some clergy] who regard themselves as fitting nicely and snugly into that role and talking about their constituency and their involvement at every opportunity. I think in all of this, people need to guard their own personal integrity because it's the only thing they come into life with and it's the only thing they can leave with' (interview 11 September 2007).

Thus starts a vicious rather than virtuous circle. Senses of self-importance rose, and with it the belief that public statements made a difference; and the more statements that were made, the greater the belief that statements—and the person making them—mattered. This makes it easy for those who are antagonistic to religion to criticize religious peacebuilders for hypocrisy—for condemning violence but not living in areas where violence was prevalent, for reverting to public statements rather than long-term action on the ground, and for criticizing church people for backchannel secretive activities that in the longer term spoke more than their own thousands of words. Indeed, some of those church figures, very well known for making public statements, came

⁹ As a secret organization it is impossible to provide figures to support this claim but anecdotal evidence supports it given the strong association in membership between the Orange Order and the Masons.

only very lately to active participation in dialogue—bishops of the COI, for instance, did not meet Gerry Adams officially until 2005, although they had been meeting him unofficially since at least 2000.

Some Catholic priests articulated their frustration at a having a church leadership eager and willing to make ritualized statements of condemnation but which failed to support their activities on the ground. Fr Egan said he had a sense 'of being with Catholic people who were not being supported and [felt] very let down by the institutional church. The leaders at the time did not understand their plight. They were issuing condemnations but were doing it from a distance, and that upset and alienated a lot of people. They felt they were not being ministered to by those who should have been serving them. I think if they [Catholic leaders] had been more willing to stand at the coalface and be with people on the front line . . .' (interview 22 November 2007). As one example, the Catholic bishops of Ireland had a letter read out at Mass denouncing violence after the IRA Enniskillen Remembrance Day bombing in 1987, and it provoked large-scale walkouts in Catholic areas. Cahal Daly said at the time that those who had walked out had seldom walked in—serving only to show how detached the hierarchy was from churchgoers in Republican strongholds. Indeed, one Catholic cleric only half-jokingly said that if you wanted to know what was going on within the Republican movement you had to ask a Protestant minister—some Protestant clergy had more meetings with Republicans than did Catholic priests.

Ironically, the measured nature of some of the public statements against violence, designed as calls for peace but without offending the factions within their denomination, sometimes ended up devoid of rhetorical flourish. William Crawley remembers 'some of the statements coming out from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland which were nervously formulated to avoid giving offence to some section of the church. [There] was a very significant section of the church that was nervous about the Good Friday Agreement, but the church wanted to be encouraging of a peace process but didn't know how to' (interview 23 September 2007).

The more sensitive church leaders admitted to what we might call 'the calculation problem': of saying what people will accept rather than what they need to hear. Robin Eames said: 'You got the blasting of criticisms when you said something the public did not like or did not agree with. And you searched, if you were like me, you searched and searched and searched when you wrote something to say, because you really [thought to yourself] what effect this was going to have on the people on the ground' (interview 29 January 2008). Harold Good, a senior leader of Irish Methodism and located within one of the most pro-peace traditions, also faced the same problem: 'I can tell you I've been there as a church leader to try and prepare a statement, by the time it comes out it is so bland that no journalist is interested in it' (interview 24 January 2006).

Vanity is the least dangerous aspect of aggrandizement, however. Churches are made up of human beings; no more or less subject to the typical competitions between people over status and ambition. Just as the peace process generally was hamstrung in its early days partially by the fight over who would get the credit for starting it—the British or Irish governments, John Hume or Gerry Adams—the churches have sometimes competed with each other to be seen ‘taking a lead’ in peacebuilding. A leading Christian peace activist once told Gareth Higgins that a member of an English prayer group had let him know that they believed their prayers to be the reason for the restoration of the IRA ceasefire in 1996; his response was to say that while he was grateful for their prayers, he assumed that secret meetings between clergy, the IRA Army Council, and the Irish and British governments might also have had something to do with it. Competition for credit prevented cooperation among the churches as the other side to denominationalism and this contributed to gaps in Christian responses to the conflict. There was competition within denominations and across them. Some displayed what we might call ‘the cuckoo complex’: wishing to suppress and supplant any other activity than their own. Methodists in particular have celebrated their own contribution to the peace process through international peace awards, books that highlight the specific contribution of particular Methodists (on Eric Gallagher, see Cooke, 2005), in pamphlets (for example, Taggart, 2005), and lectures (for example, McMaster, 1996). Their minority status, as outlined in Chapter 3, is compensated for by this attention.

BUILDING FENCES NOT BRIDGES WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY

Mistrust and misdirection, disunity and denominationalism, managerialism and megalomania—these are some of the alliterations that measure the weaknesses of the churches. Given the weaknesses described above, it should come as no surprise that the churches failed to form an alliance with secular civil society to develop an umbrella movement committed to peace and social change. There are four dimensions to this criticism, not all of which are faults to be laid against the churches: the churches’ peace work continued alongside their reproduction of sectarian civil society; pro-peace, progressive parts of the churches did not cultivate links with secular equivalents; secular civil society ostracized the church; and there was no forum to argue for or develop an umbrella organization to coordinate a fragmented civil society. We expand on these below.

With respect to the first point, we want to make a distinction that avoids us being misunderstood. We are not referring in this criticism to the inability of

churches to constrain sectarian demagogues. Structures of power and authority within churches as bureaucracies protected and constrained the fanatics as much as they did progressive mavericks. Even such a pro-peace denomination as the Methodist Church, for example, had its hotheads that confused the clarity of its peace message. The Revd Robert Bradford MP, for example, was a supporter of British Israelism (on which, see Brewer, 2003d) and was reputed to be a member of the clandestine Loyalist network Tara, although Roy Garland, an expert on these matters, thinks this is probably untrue (interview 1 November 2010). Bradford is remembered as the clergyman who asked for public prayer for a long hot summer during the 1980–1 hunger strikes so that the dirty protest could be brought to a quicker conclusion because of the stench (the act that reputedly led the IRA to murder him). At the 1979–80 Methodist Annual Conference held in Cork, Harold Good (interview 1 November 2010) remembers the presidential speech by the Revd Harold Sloan being ahead of its time in urging Methodists towards working actively for peace. This was met by a motion of no confidence from the floor by Bradford, which fellow Methodists complained bitterly against and prevented being put to the vote. The Methodist Church later passed a rule preventing parish ministers from working full-time in politics, because it displaced ministry as the full-time preoccupation, which caused Bradford to resign his parish rather than his parliamentary seat, although he remained within the Methodist Church.¹⁰ Every denomination had their equivalent, and accounts such as this can be repeated often.

Our point is that the churches did not cut their links with sectarian civil society, so irrespective of the very courageous peacebuilding undertaken by some people in the churches and the constraints on fanatics, as institutions they retained links with other civil society groups, such as the Loyal Orders and the GAA, which continued to mark them as part of the problem rather than the solution.¹¹ In such a situation it was never clear which priestly hand was dealing what cards and thus what the game actually was; the patient work of religious peacebuilders could be undercut in an instance by their own institution’s link to sectarian bodies. For example, the COI Primate at the time, Robin Eames, on the one hand felt he could not rein in the Anglican minister at Drumcree, where the stand-off between the Orange Order, local

¹⁰ The Catholic Church had internal regulations that precluded priests from public office, but Protestant clergy sometimes doubled up as politicians, particularly hardline ones, whose public pronouncements against political compromise often forced fellow clergy into secret backchannel work, where, ironically, they proved very effective.

¹¹ This forms the complaint of those who challenge the role of civil society in Northern Ireland’s peace process by arguing civil society is dominated by sectarian groups such as the GAA and the Orange Order, notably McGarry (2001b: 117). While McGarry overlooks the splits within the Orange Order noted by Kaufmann (2007), in practice the dominant ethos in both civil society groups was ethno-national exclusiveness not inclusiveness.

Catholic residents, and the security forces led annually to considerable disruption and violence for much of the 1990s, including the murder of a policeman by Loyalists and the burning to death of the children of the Catholic Quinn family in their home on a Loyalist estate in Ballymoney in July 1998.¹² Conversely, Eames was persistent in utilizing backchannel dialogue to the point where Loyalist paramilitary organizations were persuaded into agreeing to the DSD, as well as into making a public apology and a statement of contrition for their role in the violence, and accept a ceasefire (on which they later reneged, although so did the IRA).

To have cut their ties as institutions to ethno-national bodies that epitomized the level and extent of sectarian division in Northern Ireland, would have forced the churches to confront their own affinities with these identities and thus their constitutional preferences. They refused to do this: they wanted peace but without disturbing the traditional political landscape. Remaining in the 'tribe' proved more important to them as institutions in the end than dismantling tribalism. This aptly described the extent of the problem that mavericks and independent religious peacebuilders faced when trying to change churches from within—hence their frustration—and explains the preference of many for working in para-church organizations and ambivalent institutional spaces. Politicians who were working to dismantle tribalism after having moved from similarly very traditional ethno-national identities, held the churches in contempt for this. David Ervine, for example, former Loyalist combatant and ex-prisoner, and leader until his untimely death of the PUP, described religious sectarianism as like piss down people's legs, giving a warm feeling that soon went cold (interview for Brewer and Higgins, 1998: 211).

We should recognize, however, that progressive churches were trenchantly criticized by politicians whenever they floated ideas that threatened ethno-national loyalties. They were subject to constraint—rather than control—by the cultural and political processes that reproduced 'politics as usual'. Of course, in attaching themselves so closely with ethno-national identities and the political preferences embedded in them, the progressive church people opened themselves up to this pressure, but it was politicians who applied it and critics amongst their congregations in the pews who reiterated it. Politicians used allegations aplenty to try to pull them back from any radicalism—accusations of being traitors, of letting down 'their' community, and the like, made with a level of vociferousness that persuaded paramilitary organizations to reinforce the criticism with threats of physical violence, as we saw in earlier interviews.

¹² The Revd William Bingham was vociferously shouted down by Orangemen when he linked the deaths to the Orange protests in Drumcree. This offers another example of the constraints placed on religious figures when they step outside and threaten 'politics as usual', a point we develop further below.

We can give an example from outside the progressive movement. The Revd Martin Smyth, a Presbyterian clergyman, South Belfast MP for the Unionist Party, and Grand Master of the Orange Order between 1972 and 1998, but also a strong supporter of the ecumenical initiative of prayer breakfasts, in 1993 surprisingly issued the call for Unionists to open up talks with Republicans. Within hours, his party leader at the time, James Molyneaux, dissociated himself from the idea and Smyth withdrew it, saying he had been misunderstood. The DUP also criticized him heavily. He later voted against the GFA. An instance from the early peace efforts of the churches is the Feakle talks, so named because they were held in the village of Feakle in County Clare, with the full knowledge of the British ambassador in Dublin who did not discourage the initiative (Cooke, 2005: 212).

These talks have become iconic in the memory of religious peacebuilders in Northern Ireland, referenced by many of our interviewees when reflecting on the history of church engagement with the peace process (an excellent account from the perspective of the churchmen can be found in Cooke, 2005: 212–24). They assume so large an impression because the talks were both highly successful in their direct practical effects and very damaging for subsequent engagement by Protestant clergy. For example, Walter Lewis, a COI canon in South Belfast, recalls them: 'you had the Feakle talks with Bishop Butler and Jack Weir and so on. They were the sort of pioneers, they were the sort of visionaries, they risked an awful lot within their own churches and within the Protestant community to be identified with any talks with the "other side", at great cost to themselves. But those people I think were seen as prophetic leaders' (interview 3 September 2008).

There are good grounds to lionize the clergymen for what was at the time an exceedingly daring and courageous initiative. Cooke (2005: 212) reports that the Revd Eric Gallagher thought the talks to be so sensitive he did not even tell his wife beforehand. Taking place in 1974, when violence was very intense, they occurred on the back of a series of initiatives from the Conservative government in Britain that established a line of communication with the IRA. Senior Protestant clergymen from all the main denominations held secret talks with the IRA as a channel to the British government; the Revd William Arlow, Assistant Secretary to the Irish Council of Churches, who unofficially led the delegation, subsequently reported the results to Merlyn Rees, Secretary of State at the time. According to Ruairi O'Bradaigh, who later left SF over its peace strategy to become President of Republican Sinn Féin linked to the dissident Continuity IRA, the talks led to a six-month ceasefire by the IRA and debate in the British government about the long-term presence of Britain in Ireland. Almost farcically, the talks were raided by armed Special Branch officers of the Garda, according to O'Bradaigh on the instruction of the Irish government who opposed the British having contact with a movement which at the time was being criticized heavily by a new Irish government elected on law and

order issues (see McCann, 2005). Cooke (2005: 217) reports that SF had been alerted 'by their man in Dublin Castle' that they were to be raided and the three 'activists' in the IRA left early, with SF members remaining. Arlow reports that doors were smashed, voices were raised, and chaos ruled for a few hours (cited in Cooke, 2005: 218). The talks reconvened when Special Branch left and the excitement was over. That was merely the beginning of the problem faced by the churchmen.

Most Unionist politicians in Northern Ireland were furious when details of the talks became known, demanding the RUC interview the clergymen for details that might lead to the identification and imprisonment of the IRA personnel concerned. The word 'Judas' was banded around, designed for its special wounding connotations to Christians. Paisley and the Unionist Vanguard Movement, led by another firebrand William Craig, were menacing. Unionist Vanguard (on which, see Teeney, 2004) held Nuremberg-style rallies, with meetings marshalled by men wearing armbands, and rows of flags, with Craig accompanied by motorcyclists in black dress as outriders. Their emphasis was on 'direct action', and rhetoric included phrases such as 'liquidation of the enemy'. The clergymen received death threats and abusive phone calls and were vilified for allegedly wanting peace at any price. The Revd Eric Gallagher's wife took a call informing her that he would be dead by midnight. Even the Methodist Church was provoked into criticizing those of its members at the talks: the president and secretary disassociated themselves and the Methodist Church from the initiative, even though on the same day as news broke of the Feakle talks the Methodist Church was launching its own peace initiative. The talks never resumed.

Sean Farren, the SDLP politician, wished to correct the impression that everything else stopped along with the talks: 'the notion that somehow there was no dialogue except at Feakle, and then Feakle stopped and then Gerry Reynolds met a few people in the early 90s and nothing happened between times. That's a lie that needs to be nailed' (interview 27 May 2007). He could not have had Protestant clergy in mind, for the criticism heaped on their heads proved far dirtier than coals and it was many years before Protestant clergy met the IRA again in systematic dialogue, although casual contacts were kept: the Revd William Arlow maintained regular contact with Jimmy Drumm, a well-known Republican whose wife, Marie, was involved in the talks (and later murdered by Loyalists). So sensitive had the talks become that Jimmy Drumm and Arlow ended up having to contact each other via a neighbour's phone, the home of a young Francis Teeney. When we interviewed Arlow twice for this research in 2005 he would not let us record on tape or write notes; the experience still remained highly controversial in his mind. The lessons of stepping outside 'politics as usual' had been forcibly learned.

Not only did the churches *not* distance themselves from sectarian civil society, they reproduced it in another way. They did not prevent the

duplication of separate civil society groups across the denominational divide within their own organizations. The Catholic Church had their scouting organization (the Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland), for example, and the Protestant churches their Boys and Girls Brigades (which are separate from the British scouting movement, which is also present in Northern Ireland). This sort of duplication is repeated for church-based aid agencies and charities, let alone schools, religious sporting associations, and church-based leisure activities (for a classic study of sectarianism in sport, see Sugden and Bairner, 1993; after the GFA, see Bairner, 2004). Women's groups in the Protestant churches, for example, particularly prevalent in evangelical Protestantism (on which, see Porter, 2002), did not link with the putative feminization of Catholic women independently of participation in gender-blind ecumenism. In interview on 10 December 2007, Fran Porter complained bitterly of the failure of groups in the respective churches to unite on tackling common issues that affected women, such as domestic violence. The main Christian traditions 'gave God a father heart. Heaven forbid that God should have a mother heart.'

Ours is not a complaint about the failure of churches to collapse denominational boundaries; it is about their failure to work together in key sectors of civil society irrespective of formal denominational distinctions as models of cooperation for secular groups in the same field, thus leaving sectarian distinctions between these sectors intact *within* the churches. Failure to work with each other therefore gave the institutional churches no inspiration or motivation to link up with secular groups working in the same civil society sector or to the same peaceful end. There was no sharing of resources or personnel across the sacred-profane boundary and no evidence of any desire for such on the part of the churches. Boundaries were even tighter than these broad categories suggest, for finer distinctions were drawn within the sacred domain, often ruling out cooperation across denominations, let alone with secular groups. The Revd Lesley Carroll mentioned this:

The church should be an equal player in civil society. That we are not is not just the churches' fault. Other players in civil society don't necessarily see the church as having any significant role to play. But the churches themselves don't necessarily see themselves as having a significant role to play. I think the question for the churches is how do we insert ourselves into civil society in a way which is meaningful and effective, in a way that we get heard? That means we have to be running real hard and we're not running real hard, we're mostly just complaining. (Interview 10 January 2008)

This comment makes it clear that as the churches saw it, secular civil society shied away from working with them. Civil society activists blame the churches for this. The businessman Chris Gibson put it this way: 'If the businessmen said we need to get the churches involved, well, which church?'—although he

admitted that 'business has tried to stay outside that [conflict] so they could assist the debate' (interview 19 September 2007). This is a remarkable admission, but those sectors of civil society that were interested in peace still on the whole avoided the churches. Paula Curran, who works in civil society for a victim support group called Families Achieving Change Together, said: 'I have been here since 2003 and we haven't worked with the clergy or the churches. We have more or less gone down the road of working very hard to secure funding to provide services for our members that hasn't included working with clergy' (interview 5 April 2006). SF developed a strategy for developing links with the Protestant churches, but there was nothing similar in other political parties or churches. Community peace and reconciliation groups funded by the Community Relations Council and various tranches of EU peacebuilding money, sometimes linked up with ecumenist bodies (prompting the argument that the churches only had influence when they transformed from ecumenism into community relations, see Power, 2007), but this was within a narrow range of organizations and ambitions. PCROs—peace and conflict resolution organizations—as they are called (see Ganiel, 2008a: 30) have been applauded for their contribution to a culture of dialogue and for informing elites (Wilson and Tyrell, 1995: 246) but they operated within a narrow horizon that overlapped with ecumenism to the exclusion of other religious expressions and civil society interests.

Bridges were not built within civil society to harness its skills, resources, and expertise for the purposes of empowering individual groups; fences were constructed instead. This ensured that in many of the civil society spaces in which they worked, sacred and secular groups did not coordinate their activities, even, in many cases, inform others of their initiatives, resulting in overlap and omission, both too much in some areas (especially relational reconciliation) and too little in others (such as social justice). Civil society activists draw particular attention to the overlap between the churches and secular groups on prison issues (Fitzduff and Williams, 2007: 32). Appleby (2000), Smock (2006: 36), Ganiel (2008a: 28) and Brewer, Higgins and Teeney (2010) are amongst commentators that stress the importance of religious peacemakers cooperating with secular allies. It extends the strategic social spaces in civil society in which the churches work and expands the size of the peace movement. Civil society activists interviewed by Fitzduff and Williams (2007: 25) bemoaned that there was no shared analysis of Northern Ireland's situation and no agreed strategy about how to change it. Fitzduff and Williams argue this was to be expected given societal divisions.

We argue that it could have been otherwise, for above all, there was no umbrella organization in civil society with sufficient breadth of vision or with enough widespread legitimacy to command, mobilize, and coordinate its separate parts into a single movement for peace and social change. There was coordination enough in Northern Ireland *behind* fences. ECONI, ISE, and

Corrymeela worked together, for example, to mobilize ecumenism; civil society umbrella bodies such as Democratic Dialogue accomplished unity amongst some local deliberative forums, as did Community Dialogue with many local community development groups; the Women and Peacebuilding Programme did a great deal in working with local women's groups, as did the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action with third sector voluntary groups. There were networks with the potential for breaking down the fences, such as the Peace People, which imploded from internal factionalism; the Woman's Coalition, sadly also becoming defunct; and the Faith in a Brighter Future group, which could not shed its religious character. Every portent was short-lived. Civil society groups thus spoke and acted independently. The trade unions organized actions against sectarianism but did not incorporate the nascent critique of sectarianism within the progressive churches. Some in the churches criticized them for this, feeling that as a group the trade unions had little influence, pining against that of the churches (Fr Egan, interview 22 November 2007). Peter Bunting, one of the more prominent trade unionists in Northern Ireland said, on the other hand, 'I would blame the churches for that [lack of cooperation]' (interview 30 January 2008).

The blame lies with neither but with the fissures in civil society itself. Fragmentation precluded the development in Northern Ireland of the equivalent of the UDF in South Africa (on whose coordinating role, see Houston, 1999; Knox and Quirk, 2000: 164; Brewer, 2003c: 137–8) or the civil rights movement in the USA (on whose role in 'civic repair', see Alexander, 2006: Part III), groups able to link the churches with secular bodies within an umbrella organization that motivated and managed the overarching alliance in civil society. This meant that civil society engagements with politics—political parties, paramilitary organizations, governments, and international actors—were dissolved to the level of the individual group or person; the fragmentation of civil society individualized its influence, and while this impact was great for certain key players and groups in civil society, it could have been much greater had there been an alliance led by an umbrella body. Civil society in South Africa mediated between the grass roots and the state, filling the democratic deficit left by a failing state (see Brewer, 2003c: 129–39). Brewer (2003c: 137–9) has argued that this meant that civil society was able to slow the slide into violence that seemed to threaten the townships, was able to mediate between the grass roots, ANC, and government in the negotiating process to ensure representativeness, and during the interregnum while the new constitution was being deliberated, it monitored the National Peace Accord by which political parties and groups agreed to conduct their competition for power peacefully (on which they were only partly successful). In the interregnum there were local peace committees—more than 200 in all—and the churches were well represented, working alongside community and voluntary groups, NGOs, women's groups, trade unions, tribal authorities, residents'

groups, and the like in a powerful display of the advantages of coordinated planning in civil society. There was no possibility that the churches could have provided this leadership in Northern Ireland, perceived, as they were, as part of the problem, and torn asunder by weaknesses that prevented them showing any lead whatsoever. It also has to be admitted that progressive churches in South Africa earned considerable legitimacy from their anti-apartheid activities that carried over into acceptance of their mediating role (as well as into their post-conflict activities), which the churches as institutions lacked in Northern Ireland—this legitimacy was extended only to certain individuals known to have been key players in the peace process.

In all probability, the churches as institutions would not have been a significant contributor to this umbrella body had fractures within civil society not made the alliance inconceivable. Clem McCartney (1999), a prominent civil society organizer, made the telling point that the polarization—perhaps a better term might be fragmentation—of Northern Irish civil society prevented interaction with the political process. This helps explain the exclusion of civil society, including the churches, from the political peace process that negotiated the GFA (as well as from the AIA), resulting in the top-down negotiation processes that civil society activists complain about (see Fitzduff and Williams, 2007: 23).

CONCLUSION

Civil society in Northern Ireland was not only divided between its regressive and progressive elements, as we should have expected given the centrality of the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' civil society in the literature (Chambers and Kopstein, 2001), but the progressive elements were further fractured. One way to understand these fissures is through the spheres or strategic social spaces in which civil society operated within the peace process, as we illustrated in Chapter 3. Another analytical device is to separate sacred and secular civil society groups and, within that, to divide the progressive churches in terms of how they responded to the need for peace. This is what we have attempted in this chapter. Some of these divisions were caused by the sensitivity surrounding 'the sacred' in a conflict where religion was perceived to be part of the problem, making other sectors of civil society unwilling to work with the churches. The weaknesses did not just lie with others, however. Turning themselves into part of the solution was difficult for the progressive churches partly because, irrespective of the wider society's need for peace, they had imbibed its sectarianism, misdiagnosed the problem, and misdirected their efforts. Violence itself was the problem as they perceived it, to be

counteracted by relational reconciliation, resulting in negative peace becoming the priority over positive peace. This allowed the progressive churches to urge for peace without disturbing traditional politics in Northern Ireland or disrupting its patterns of class, wealth, and power, of which, of course, as individuals and groups they were major beneficiaries. Most religious peacemakers had a poverty of vision, and whereas the odd maverick or two railed against this constraint, the institutional churches mostly pulled them back, absorbed them, marginalized them or, occasionally, ostracized them. And where 'politics as usual' was being threatened by religious peacemaking, the politicians did all they could to rein them in as well. The churches' fear of splitting congregations did likewise.

Religious peacemakers were mostly highly critical of their institutions because of this but occasionally they defended their churches with the argument that prophetic leadership can only be shown by individuals; corporations have no soul. The Revd John Dunlop put it this way: 'Do you remember Jack Weir, who was the Clerk of the Assembly [of the PCI], he was involved in this stuff away early on at Feakle. Somebody asked Jack one time if the church could have a prophetic role and he said, and I think it was a wise statement, that it was doubtful if the church collectively could have very much of a prophetic role. But what the church ought to be able to do, out of the body of the church ought to come some prophetic people who would be supported by the rest of the church or not be undermined by them or be criticized by some people in the church. You find individual people will do very significant things, whereas the total corporate body may not themselves be able to go as far as some individuals would be able to go' (interview 23 March 2006).

This is an apt description of Dunlop's life as an individual prophetic leader but not his church. The PCI was slow, cumbersome, hesitant, and unsure, giving little support to individuals but plenty of criticism. For example, the Revd Ken Newell, Presbyterian minister in Fitzroy until 2009, was accused of representing the antichrist by some colleagues inside the PCI. Religious peacemaking was an individualized and individualizing process, which not only reflected the paucity of the institutional churches' peace vocation, it measured their lack of progress as institutions in moving from being what Jakelic (2010) calls 'collective religions'.

Before we expand on the notion of 'collective religion' it is necessary to show that our terminology here is not contradictory. Because the churches remained as collectivizing institutions as part of the wider process of ethno-national identity formation in Northern Ireland, churches got wrapped up with the reproduction of group identity. Religious peacemakers therefore either worked within the framework of traditional ethnic 'politics as usual' or separated themselves from and stepped outside their institutions on an

individual basis, working with no or ambivalent authority from the institutional churches. We call this the process of individualization. Collectivization and individualization are therefore concomitants rather than contradictions. It is in their failure to resist these collectivizing tendencies that the institutional churches in Northern Ireland assisted in the reproduction of social conflict and failed to provide the sort of prophetic leadership that as an institution the DRC displayed in South Africa during the collapse of apartheid, when it admitted its past mistakes, distorted theologies and racist practices, and made public apology for them. It might well be that Archbishop Tutu was a prophetic leader in the way that the Anglican Church in South Africa was not, as Dunlop claimed in interview (23 March 2006) as proof that corporations are soulless, but prophetic leadership was evidenced at an institutional level in South Africa by the DRC when eliminating its collectivizing practices. Let us therefore now explore the idea of collective religion as the Northern Irish churches' chief weakness.

Within contemporary sociology of religion the emphasis is upon two processes—the decline in religious observance in the West and the importance of choice for those remaining believers when determining their preferred form of religiosity. Choice is seen as the necessary concomitant of late modernity, in which the decline of tradition and the dissolution of rigid social structures gives people limitless horizons to construct for themselves, as Beck (2010) says, 'a god of their own'. However, in the West (and especially elsewhere) some societies still remain where religious identification is almost ascribed, giving people little or no choice about membership or practice. This is because religion stands in for ethnicity, national origin, cultural, and linguistic differences to such a degree that religious identification and membership is coterminous with group identity. In these societies, individuals are not immune to the global processes that promote individualization and personal choice, but individual identity is absorbed to a greater extent in the group. Social conflict undermines this process and pulls people's identity formation in collective directions. Jakelic has the Balkans in mind (2010: chapters 2–3) but recognizes the persistence of collective religion in Northern Ireland (2010: chapter 4(b)). Collective religions may well represent an anomaly against global trends towards 'post-traditional society', as Giddens (1996: 8–64) puts it, but in places where group loyalties persist as part of social conflict, collective religions survive effortlessly as part of the cultural reproduction of 'groupness', as Brubaker (2002) describes it.

This is the error made by Beck (2010) in failing to recognize the persistence of tradition under limited social structural circumstances, where choice in religion is secondary to the duty to belong (if not necessarily to faithfully practice). Thus, while there was a pronounced fall in observance amongst Christians in Northern Ireland at the turn of the millennium, there was no increase in religious independents (roughly still about one in ten people; see

Hayes, Fahey, and Sinnott, 2005) or decrease in religious identification, espoused roughly by nine out of every ten people (see Brewer, 2003b).¹³

It is tragically ironic that in pursuit of activities designed to eliminate conflict, Northern Ireland's progressive churches reproduced themselves as collective religions that perpetuated it. But we have emphasized in this chapter that one of the central weaknesses of the progressive churches was their continued association with sectarian identities as part of the elision between religion and ethno-nationalism. Even progressive churches worked within the tramlines of tribalism and 'groupness' by not challenging systemic injustice, inequality, and unfair social distribution and instead translating religious peacebuilding into interpersonal reconciliation and relational togetherness. The collectivizing character of Catholicism and Protestantism continued; what mattered was that members of the religions could relate to one another 'properly'. This may have involved a critique by many religious peacemakers of the sense of superiority 'as the one true church' within Irish Catholicism and the equation of land, nation, and religion within conservative evangelicism that made 'Ulster' seemingly their own, disabusing both of their inherent self-righteousness, but few religious peacemakers queried that violence itself was the main problem and thus did not move beyond seeing the solution as improving personal relations between individual Catholics and Protestants. The churches' chief weakness was thus to focus on conflict transformation at the expense of social transformation, because to do otherwise was to break up collective religion itself by changing the political and class landscapes of Northern Ireland. Fr Des Wilson summed this up well, and we can conclude this chapter no better than by repeating his earlier comment. 'It always seemed to me that what the churches were looking for was peace without change' (interview 9 November 2005).

¹³ Hence the colloquialism in Northern Ireland that there is no such thing as a lapsed Catholic or Protestant, for while observance might decline, even stop, identity formation processes retain the association with them as groups.