



Image of the day - Botanic Gardens, Belfast

Reports

Bishop of Derry sees lessons from Catholic Church in approach to NI Troubles

Last week, the UK government revealed controversial proposals for preventing any further criminal prosecutions and inquests, as well as civil cases and Police Ombudsman investigations, arising from the Troubles in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998.

An announcement about this in Parliament by the Minister, **Brandon Lewis**, last Wednesday was accompanied by the publication of a 32-page command paper, citing the "difficulty of securing criminal justice outcomes" and costs to the public purse of legal aid.

The document points out that "over 3,500 people were killed during the Troubles, almost one third of whom were members of the security forces."

Following the collapse in May of the trial of two former paratroopers for murder on 'Bloody Sunday' in January 1972, criminal cases against two other soldiers for killings that year were discontinued earlier this month.

According to **Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney**, writing in the Guardian the UK's current proposals amount effectively to "an unconditional amnesty". This "would not

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have the support of the political parties in Northern Ireland" or "of those representing the bereaved families left behind by conflict in Ireland, north or south, or in Britain".

He added, "Whether the person who killed their loved one was a soldier or a member of a paramilitary organisation, every family bereaved in the conflict must have access to an effective investigation and to a process of justice, regardless of the perpetrator."

In their 2014 Stormont House Agreement, the UK and Irish governments, together with Northern Ireland's political parties, committed jointly to addressing the legacy of the Troubles by respecting certain principles, including "upholding the rule of law" and "addressing the suffering of victims and survivors", as well as compliance with human rights.

Article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees an "effective remedy before a national authority" for violations of Convention rights. These include the right to life under Article 2, which imposes a positive obligation on states to protect the lives of citizens from actions not only of states themselves, but also of non-state third parties (para. 15), and to carry out an "effective official investigation" into any violent deaths (paras. 133-134).

The remedy required under Article 13 can include private legal action as well as, or sometimes instead of, criminal prosecutions. Several cases have come before the European Court of Human Rights concerning deaths during the Troubles (paras. 76-77).

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Simon Coveney commented further in the Guardian, "We do not believe an approach based on a general statute of limitations would be compatible with the obligations of the European convention on human rights. It would undoubtedly be tested in the courts and if it failed there, it would only add years of uncertainty and misery for families with no benefit ... We will not advance reconciliation by moving away from a commitment to accountability or shying away from difficult truths."



This last sentiment was in part echoed by the Catholic **Bishop of Derry, Bishop Donal McKeown**, in his Sunday homily this week.

Whilst firmly rejecting "heroic" narratives of violence, Bishop McKeown also drew a striking parallel between historical child abuse in his own Church and the legacy of hurt from the Troubles: "We have so many people in our city, in our

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country, who are hurting after the Troubles here. And in every conflict, the majority of those who died were not combatants, but bystanders, civilians. So many deaths of innocent people may be an embarrassment to those who are responsible for their death. But their deaths and injury have scarred thousands down through the generations, some of whom dare not speak about their loss, because it would undermine narratives about heroic warriors.

"We know from Church life that there's a temptation to hide uncomfortable truths. Dark secrets are always unwelcome. But the effect of current government proposals on legacy is to prevent too much prying into dark corners of a dirty war. That will protect reputations, but will not help the hurting little ones for whom Jesus was and remains most concerned. Any system that appears to prioritise the feelings of the perpetrators over the distress of the victims is guaranteed only to perpetuate the pain, not draw a line under it. Just because some powerful people prefer to keep some truths hidden is no reason for civic leadership to facilitate that.

"Just as the abuse of children over half a century ago should be investigated to see what can be learnt, so too the killing of innocent men, women and children should not be locked away beyond prying eyes.

"We have to proclaim and show that divine pity is more important than political propriety."



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People and places



Everest challenge raises more than £12,000

The Rev Canon Stuart Lloyd's 'Everest via Slemish Challenge,' completed over the course of a week during June, has raised more than £12,000 for two charities working in Nepal.

On behalf of Stuart (left of photo), Sarah Gamble treasurer of St. Patrick's, Broughshane, presented cheques to Ian McKay (Koshish) and Roger Thompson (Church Mission Society Ireland).

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Stuart climbed Slemish 50 times over seven days – thus climbing the height of Mount Everest. The project was sponsored by St Patrick’s, Ballymena, St Patrick’s, Broughshane, and St Patrick’s Coleraine and received support from these communities and further afield. Stuart said he was delighted with the backing he received and the success of the venture. “We were blessed indeed with the publicity we received, with the numbers that joined in the climb, with the good weather and with the absence of any falls or spills,” the former rector of St Patrick’s, Ballymena, said.

“We were especially overwhelmed with the financial support we received. Our profound thanks go to all those who contributed in any way to the project. This support will be very much appreciated by our mission partners in Nepal.”

The money raised has been divided between Church Mission Society Ireland and its work in Nepal, and Koshish, a Nepali NGO that seeks to improve mental health in that country.

Historic commemoration and journey to reconciliation

Bishop Paul Colton talks about historic commemoration and the journey to reconciliation: As part of the Journey in Self-belief project, the Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Dr Paul Colton, has recently been interviewed by Paul McFadden <https://churchofirelandcork.com/2021/07/18/bishop-paul-colton-talks-about-historic-commemoration-and-the-journey-to-reconciliation/>

Songs of Praise Gospel Singer of the Year

Exciting news for all amateur Gospel singers! SOP is launching their Gospel Singer of the Year competition. To find out how to enter & to read the all important Terms & Conditions & Privacy Notices go to bbc.co.uk/songsofpraise

Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Catholicism

Free online conference, Thurs & Fri, really good line-up of speakers <https://padlet.com/ianhickey/uk7uydlodluqdf83>

Churches Together in England resources for Education Sunday 2021

CTE has announced that Education Sunday 2021 will take place on Sunday 12 September. “It is a national day of prayer and celebration for everyone in the world of education, marked by churches and schools across the country.”

Resources for Education Sunday 2021 are available at

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[www.cte.org.uk/educationsunday2021] – and are intended to be used as a springboard for a variety of events on or around Education Sunday.

For well over one hundred years there has been an annual recognition of Education Sunday in England and Wales. The theme is devised by an ecumenical steering group representing different Christian denominations and organisations.

Read more in the introduction to this year's theme by Rev Dr Hugh Osgood, President of Churches Together in England and Moderator of the Free Churches Group:

The theme for Education Sunday this year is 'A word in season', taken from Isaiah 50:4. We find these words in the midst of the Servant Songs where Isaiah was writing prophetically about the ministry of the coming Messiah, explaining that the One who was to come would be an anointed teacher, who would be able to speak "a word in season", the right word at the right time, to the weary.

But Isaiah 50:4 is a particularly interesting verse as it speaks of being awakened to hear as well as being equipped to teach. After the challenges of the last eighteen months, it is clear that those who teach are as much in need of a refreshing word as those who learn from them. This is what makes Education Sunday this year so important. There are education issues all around us that cannot be ignored, from both the perspective of the teacher and the student.

In focussing on 'a word in season' we need to acknowledge the weariness that must surely have affected the whole

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education sector as it has coped with the disruption of Covid, but we also need to keep in mind the strength that will make enable us to open up the possibilities that lie ahead. A word in season at a time such as this must bring encouragement and hope as well as understanding and support, to student and teacher alike. It cannot be a trite word. The world is already too full of empty and undermining words as, sadly, it is often the negative ones that spread. Now is the time for us to be bold; to speak out clearly and to seek God positively.

Education Sunday provides a great opportunity to give thanks to God for all who teach and all who study, for all who continually have to find the right words and deliver them with enthusiasm and graciousness, for all who have to build constructively on all that has been learnt before while constantly opening up new horizons. It is also an excellent opportunity for releasing some great resources for worship, and this year is no exception.

Teaching and studying are demanding and privileged callings. We can take heart from the One of whom Isaiah wrote and of whom the Gospels speak. Here we find ample evidence that the right word delivered in the right way at the right time can change lives. The fact that the Church knows this through experience positions us well to take up this Education Sunday's theme. The world in general and the education sector in particular need a word in season. Let us play a part in bringing such a word.

Find out more at [www.cte.org.uk/educationsunday2021]

Media review

UK plan for Troubles amnesty breaches international obligations – Irish minister

The Guardian

The latest pressure from Dublin comes as the head of the Catholic church in Ireland, Eamon Martin, said victims “would feel a sense of betrayal”, and ...

[[] <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jul/15/uk-plan-to-end-troubles-prosecutions-breaks-international-obligations-irish-minister>]

Report on refurbishment work due to start at Lambeth Palace.

Church Times

[[] <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/16-july/news/uk/lambeth-palace-at-risk-of-catastrophic-failure-say-commissioners>]

Thinking anew

Michael Commane in the Irish Times

On July 1st, the People’s Republic of China placed a full-page advertisement in this newspaper. The text was written by the Chinese ambassador to Ireland, He Xiangdong, to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China.

The publication attracted criticism, as there were those who felt it was wrong for a country with a reputation such as China’s to be given a prominent space in a national newspaper.

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[[] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/thinking-anew-learning-to-trust-the-people-1.4619516>]

Methodists are entitled to respect for their deeply held religious beliefs

A letter from Dr Gerald Morgan published in the News Letter The mantle of doctrinal infallibility in Northern Ireland has now passed, it seems, from Roman Catholics to Bangor Humanists ('While even DUP move on gay issues, Methodists do not, July 12, see link below).

[[] <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/opinion/letters/methodists-are-entitled-to-respect-for-their-deeply-held-religious-beliefs-3308088>]

Irish Christian Brothers fall short on revealing true extent of sexual abuse by its members

Chicago Sun-Times

Deluged with child sex abuse lawsuits that threatened its finances, the Irish Christian Brothers filed for bankruptcy protection in 2011.

As part of a bankruptcy reorganization plan a judge later approved, the Catholic religious order — which runs Brother Rice High School on the Far Southwest Side, St. Laurence High School in Burbank and 13 other high schools around the United States — set aside millions of dollars for victims. It also agreed to make public a list of its members accused of having molested kids and other reforms — but only the names of those accused of at least two instances of child sex abuse.

Based on interviews, court records and news accounts, the Chicago Sun-Times found eight other Irish Christian Brothers who served in the Chicago ...

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[[] <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2021/7/16/22570696/irish-christian-brothers-clergy-child-sexual-abuse-reporting-catholic-religious-orders>]

Opinion

Unionism is running out of both political and demographic road by Andy Pollak

I should start by welcoming Sir Jeffrey Donaldson as the new leader of the DUP, following Edwin Poots' brief and inglorious reign. Donaldson is the nearest that ultra-dogmatic party gets to a pragmatist: a courteous man from a modest County Down background who has spent a lifetime in politics, a skilled and practiced Westminster parliamentarian, and a supporter of north-south cooperation.

However he has some huge problems on his plate. As the excellent Belfast News Letter political editor Sam McBride pointed out earlier this month, the Northern Ireland Protocol will dominate next May's Assembly election, when the DUP will seek a mandate to vote down the Irish Sea trade border when they get a say on it in 2024.¹ In line with this hard-line policy, in Donaldson's first speech he said the Protocol was "a threat to the living standards of the people of Northern Ireland and to the constitutional integrity of the UK."

But when he was asked a journalist whether he was prepared to "pull down Stormont if the Northern Ireland Protocol is not removed", he replied: "I would not use those words."

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McBride says that the EU has privately communicated to the DUP that it should be realistic in its demands. “Brussels has essentially said ‘Ask for how we can make the Protocol less obtrusive but don’t ask for it to be ditched because that won’t happen.’” This EU policy of limited relaxation of the Irish Sea border saw Brussels u-turning to alter its own legislation in order to get around provisions in the Protocol which would have otherwise disrupted the flow of medicines from Britain to Northern Ireland.

The DUP leader’s dilemma is whether to play the only real card he has – collapsing Stormont to protest against the Protocol – or to calculate that it can only be mitigated rather than removed. If the latter, in McBride’s words: “Does he want his leadership to be defined by defeat in pressing for the unachievable or does he seek to quietly push this out of sight and focus on other issues? Unionist history suggests that he will either go in a hardline direction or lose his party.” And this is at a point when, following the resignation of North Down MLA Alex Easton (who said that within the DUP “there is no respect, discipline or decency”), we have now reached a hugely significant moment, with Sinn Fein as the largest party in the NI Assembly.

Because the deeper, demographic trends remain firmly against unionism. In a thoughtful essay in last month’s Dublin Review of Books² my friend, the Belfast-based social researcher Paul Nolan, pointed out that in the 2011 Northern Ireland census, for the first time since the foundation of the state, the Protestant population fell below 50% (coming in at 48%). That census showed that above the age of 40 Protestants were in a majority; below 40 the majority was Catholic. The 2011 school census was even starker: 50.8%

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of school students then were from a Catholic background, 37% from a Protestant background. “Those cultural identifications are likely to stay with these children as they move up the age ladder and join the electorate. This is the essential fact that has to be grasped when considering the future of politics in Northern Ireland.”

Other unpalatable facts for unionism are that only two out of Northern Ireland’s six counties (Antrim and Down) now have unionist majorities. Only one of the province’s four cities (Lisburn) has a unionist majority. The student populations of both the North’s universities have Catholic majorities.

However Nolan also points to two reasons why a Catholic majority is unlikely to emerge from this year’s census. “The first is that the Catholic birth rate has slowed and is now very close to that of the Protestant community. The second is that more and more people from both the Catholic and Protestant gene pools are moving beyond the two communal identities and self-designating as ‘neither/nor’ or as ‘Others’.” That “will keep the Catholic population below 50%.”

He then cites an obscure document called the Labour Force Religion Study, issued by the NI Executive Office. The latest 2019 study showed that of the numbers aged 16-64 (i.e. those in the workforce), Catholics were 43%, Protestants 38% and Others 18%.

He warns that the relatively new four way split among the communities in the North – Catholic, Protestant, Others and minority ethnic groups – makes predicting the arithmetic of future censuses much more complicated than the simple

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Protestant/Catholic split that has traditionally dominated public discourse on the subject. “If we are going to simplify, then the 40/40/20 formulation best captures the movement away from a simple binary... The core reality is that no one community is going to be in the majority, if the term majority is taken to mean more than 50%. We are moving to a situation of three communities: Protestants, Catholics and Others. The exact percentage shares of the pie are anyone’s guess, but 40/40/20 is likely to be too neat: the Protestant community is likely to be shown to be smaller in size than the Catholic community. When that realisation sinks in, there is likely to be a sense of existential threat to the community that, one hundred years ago, had a state created that was designed to make it a majority forever.”

Nolan then traces the demographic changes through to the political arithmetic. After the May 2017 Assembly election unionism became a minority in that regional parliament for the first time, with the DUP, the Ulster Unionists and Traditional Unionist Voice winning only 45.7% of the vote and 40 out of 90 Assembly seats. In the two elections in 2019 – European and Westminster – unionism’s vote flatlined around 43%. The most recent Lucid Talk opinion poll in January 2021 showed it dropping further to 41%.

A century ago Edward Carson set out a path for unionism at the birth of the Northern Ireland state when he advised the new government in Belfast to show that “the Catholic minority have nothing to fear from a Protestant majority.” Wise words, says Nolan, which were completely ignored. “An historic opportunity for a reset came after the Good Friday Agreement, when the Catholic middle class embraced the new dispensation, one which would see them

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accepting UK governmental structures in exchange for the right to fully express their sense of Irish identity. They were never going to embrace Orange culture, but they were content to live as British citizens. Peter Robinson grasped that if there was never again going to be a unionist majority, there could still be a pro-Union majority. The strategically wise thing to do was to keep middle class Catholics on board; instead members of the DUP seemed to go out of their way to antagonise them with mockery of the Irish language, funding of loyalist paramilitaries, refusal to enact an Irish Language Act and, when in government, a display of majoritarian swagger reminiscent of the Brookeborough era.”

And then came Brexit, and they simply didn't understand the implications for little Northern Ireland of being hard-line Brexiteers. Theresa May's attempts to keep the whole of the UK inside the same arrangements were rejected in favour of “striking an uber-British pose” alongside the Tory Party's Brexit-obsessed European Research Group.

The Protocol isn't about trading concerns or access to markets, which the rest of the people in Britain and Ireland think it is. For the unionists it is, rather, “an existential issue about identity, about being fully British.”

This branding of the problem of the Protocol as a unionist constitutional concern has had the “entirely predictable effect of uniting all non-unionists in a single block. This has been the pattern with all issues in recent years, particularly those to do with the cultural wars – abortion, same sex marriage, the Irish language – and a form of polarisation has evolved which leaves unionism at one pole and everyone

else at the opposite one. It is an unwise approach. The opinions of your opponents can perhaps be disregarded when you are a majority, but not when you are a minority. And actually the problem for unionism is worse than that. If it appears to be standing on an ice floe that is shrinking beneath its feet, that's because there is a growing number of post-unionist Protestants, particularly in the younger age groups, who have a broad identification with Britain as a liberal, secular state, but are alienated by the ethnic forms and rituals of loyalist culture and no longer identify with the unionist parties.”

Nolan ends with a stern warning. “The onus of proof has always been on unionists to prove Northern Ireland is not a ‘failed state’. Unionism has to show that Northern Ireland can work. Tearing down the institutions will not help. Tearing down the institutions when the whole future of the UK is under discussion, and when unionism is on its way to becoming a minority culture, is suicidal.

“The crisis of unionism at present may be fixed on the narrow issue of the Protocol. The argument of this essay is that it must be recognised that this problem has roots that go much deeper and implications that go much wider. One hundred years ago a new state was created because of the fears that unionists in the north-east of Ireland had about becoming a minority in an independent state. At this point, with a census under way, unionists will have to contend with becoming a minority in the state that was created for them. That will require deeper thinking and wiser leadership than we have seen so far.”

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1 'Sir Jeffrey Donaldson may want compromise on the Irish Sea border, but the DUP might not', News Letter, 3 July 2021

2 'Running out of Road', Dublin Review of Books, June 2021

First published Posted on Monday, 19 July, 2021 by Andy Pollak on his 2 Irelands web site.

[[] <https://2irelands2gether.com/2021/07/19/unionism-is-running-out-of-both-political-and-demographic-road/>]

Pointers for prayer

Mighty God, in whom we know the power of redemption, you stand among us in the shadows of our time.

As we move through every sorrow and trial of this life, uphold us with knowledge of the final morning when, in the glorious presence of your risen Son, we will share in his resurrection, redeemed and restored to the fullness of life and forever freed to be your people. Amen.

Living God,
long ago, faithful women
proclaimed the good news
of Jesus' resurrection,
and the world was changed forever.
Teach us to keep faith with them,
that our witness may be as bold,
our love as deep,
and our faith as true. Amen.



Creator of the universe,
you made the world in beauty,
and restore all things in glory
through the victory of Jesus Christ.

We pray that, wherever your image is still disfigured
by poverty, sickness, selfishness, war and greed,
the new creation in Jesus Christ may appear in justice, love,
and peace,
to the glory of your name. Amen.

O God, your Son remained with his disciples after his
resurrection,
teaching them to love all people as neighbours.

As his disciples in this age,
we offer our prayers on behalf of the universe
in which we are privileged to live
and our neighbours with whom we share it....

Petitions... concluding with:

Open our hearts to your power moving
around us and between us and within us,
until your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and

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enemy,
in communities transformed by justice and compassion,
and in the healing of all that is broken. Amen.

Holy God,
you have called us to follow in the way of your risen Son,
and to care for those who are our companions,
not only with words of comfort, but with acts of love.
Seeking to be true friends of all,
we offer our prayers on behalf of the church and the world.
Petitions... concluding with:
Guide us in the path of discipleship,
so that, as you have blessed us,
we may be a blessing for others,
bringing the promise of the kingdom near
by our words and deeds. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul

I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

Philippians 1:6 NLT

I love the confidence with which Paul writes about the future. When you hear most people talking about the future they are often hesitant and anxious. I'm sure, like me, you have often heard people saying, "Things just keep going from bad to worse," or "What a terrible world to be brought up in." Paul is so different. He looks at the Philippians' future from God's perspective and is sure that he won't let them down. He will complete what he has begun.

Isn't it wonderful to know that our future is absolutely secure in God's hands? But that knowledge shouldn't cause us to become complacent. Paul certainly wasn't! In chapter three of this letter he talks about straining forward like an athlete (chapter 3.13) so that he could get to know the Lord better.

One of the most valuable ways of getting to know God better is through reading the Bible. I hope these notes are helpful to you but I would always encourage you to read more and more of the Bible. Some might find it helpful to read through the Bible in one year and, having done so a few times in recent years, I strongly recommend this. But that's not for everyone and doesn't need to be. What matters is that we find effective ways of getting to know the Bible better and, whether we read a lot or a little, to give time to listening to God. When Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy he told him that, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realise what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right." (2 Timothy 3.16) Given that the only Scripture available at the time was the Old Testament you will realise how much more blessed we are these days! If you want to become stronger in your Christian life I encourage you to read the Bible, enjoy it and get to know the Lord much better.

QUESTION

Are you looking to the future with confidence?

PRAYER

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Thank you, loving Lord, that my future is entirely secure in your hands. Amen

