



# CNI

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## **PRESS WATCH - Church leaders must take tougher stance over shambles at Stormont**

**Far be it from me to take pleasure in criticising our Church leaders who have a difficult **job** to do, but I think that they have misjudged the public mood in their statement on the Stormont talks, Alf McCreary writes in the Belfast Telegraph**

Undoubtedly they are trying to pour oil on troubled waters, and this is something you would rightly expect from Church representatives.

They remind us of the "vision that inspired our peace **process** where communities could live free from the threat of violence, with the benefits of a peaceful society."

They remind us also of the commitment to a protection of rights for all, and the hope that "a

culture of violence would give way to truth and justice and the righting of social wrongs."

Also mentioned is the hope of a transformation in our political culture from a "us and them" mentality to a truly inclusive society. All of this we can accept without question.

They carefully point to the progress that has been made in recent years.

However, in a massive understatement, they declare that "Not everything in this vision has yet been achieved."

Not half it hasn't. We all know only too well that, as the Church leaders state: "A culture of blame will only trap us in an endless cycle of instability and insecurity."

How many times have we heard this before? The Church leaders' statement reads as if it was put together by a committee of well-meaning people who do not want to use tough language in case they might offend someone and attract criticism themselves. They should be tougher than that.

The Church leaders are telling you and me that the politicians need our support to come together to articulate a new vision for the future.

That is a statement of the obvious, and it is precisely what many business and community leaders have been articulating for the past 20 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

Yet we are in a bigger mess than ever. Our politicians live in a big bubble beyond us.

The Church leaders kindly state: "Our elected representatives need our support if they are to have the courage to take responsibility for finding lasting solutions."

All of this is like a gentle rebuke from a thoughtful uncle of those who have just pulled the roof all around them and are standing in the rubble of their own making.

The Church leaders need to go further and reflect the huge public anger of the members of all denominations who are fed up to the back teeth with inefficiency and stalemate at Stormont, as well as the bloodymindedness of most politicians who want to down one another, instead of making concessions on all sides for the sake of the common good.

We have just gone through a brutal, unwanted election which could have been averted by

goodwill and political skill from the DUP leadership.

We stand aghast at the continued arrogance of the DUP who have lost 10 Assembly seats and still talk as if they had an election victory.

It beggars belief that many of them still think that their current leader should be allowed to stay, and they behave as if they have learned nothing at all from the current debacle.

They have made Sinn Fein seem statesmanlike for the time being, though we know that the Shinners have no monopoly of good behaviour or political generosity themselves.

The public is still very angry about the culture of mutual political insults, and the fact that too many of the well-paid politicians are still not doing the **business**.

There is a time for gentle words of encouragement, of the kind which the Church leaders **offer**, but there is also a time for straight talking about the justified anger which so many of us feel.

Those who read and obey the Bible should note that a justifiably enraged Jesus Christ threw the

money-lenders out of the temple. He knew how to deal with that situation.

Kind words alone at this time will not butter many parsnips in the current mess in Northern Ireland.

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