



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2017/10/47
Creation Dates:	16 March 1987
Extent and medium:	11 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

ST. PATRICK'S EVE SERVICE
IN ST. ANNE'S CATHEDRAL, BELFAST

Monday, 16th. March, 1987, at 7.30 p.m.

A CALL TO COMMITMENT

ADDRESS BY BISHOP CAHAL B. DALY
of Down and Connor

We are now two weeks into Lent, the great Christian season for repentance and conversion. There has been manifest evidence already that God's grace is working powerfully in the lives of many. But there have also been many grim reminders of the power of evil.

EVIL IS AT WORK

The past week alone has seen five heartless murders. Evil has manifested itself in the murder of Reserve Constable Nesbitt. Evil has shown a new and horrifying face in a murder attempt at the very gates of a cemetery, timed on the occasion of the funeral of that constable and adding a new dimension of anguish to the heartbreak of his relatives. Such a place and such a time would be held sacred even by unbelievers. Evil has been stalking our streets and roads, leaving a trail of blood, the blood of neighbours hunted down and remorselessly shot in internecine feud.

So there is sadness and shame to dampen the joy of this year's St. Patrick's Day. It is difficult not to feel discouraged and depressed when things like this can happen in the weeks leading up to this great celebration by Irish Christians all over the world of the faith first preached amongst us by St. Patrick.

MEN AND WOMEN OF CHRISTIAN HOPE

But we are not discouraged. We refuse to be depressed. We meet tonight in the context of the "Declaration of Faith and Commitment by Christians in Northern Ireland". Faith and hope are inseparable. We Christians are men and women of hope.

Christian hope is "an anchor for the soul" in a dark and stormy sea, "as sure as it is firm" (cfr Hebrews 6 : 19), because it is "stayed fast" on Christ, the eternally steadfast Rock of our faith. No power of wind or wave can overturn it. No human tragedy or wickedness can overwhelm it. We listen tonight to a voice that speaks above the storm:

In the world you have tribulations; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16 : 33)

Pile-driven into the rock foundation which is Christ, our faith and hope are stronger than anything that is in the world. In Christ, our faith and hope are already sure of victory over the world. St. John says:

This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith (1 John 5 : 4).

Christian faith and hope are not just the feeling that things will somehow work out for good in the end. They are the certainty that things have already worked out for good; for sin has already been defeated by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, hostility has already been overcome, reconciliation is already a fact.

The task of the Christian is not a lonely and despairing human struggle against sin and evil, of which the outcome is uncertain. It is rather our laying firm hold by faith on the victory which Christ has already won over sin and evil. Someone has written:

Christ has already won all our battles for us, long before we were born.

So we are not here to hurl anathemas at the men of the bomb and the bullet. We simply say to them, quietly and confidently:

Your campaign will never succeed, it can never succeed, for the fundamental reason that it is sinful; and sin is already defeated, its seeming success is trumpery, its apparent power is illusion. It is as true now as when St. Paul spoke that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5 : 21).

To the men of the bomb and the bullet we wish to speak quietly and lovingly:

No matter what you do, you will never succeed in making God stop loving you and waiting for you to turn away from your sins so that he may forgive you.

Wherever you hide, His love will find you, His grace will wait at your door. Your consciences will never give you peace until you open the door to Him and ask for His forgiveness.

RECONCILIATION

Violence makes the work of reconciliation humanly more difficult. But reconciliation is not a merely human task: it is a divine work, it is an already accomplished fact, it is a present reality. St. Paul says:

It is all God's work. It was God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on the reconciliation. God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself. And He has entrusted to us the news that they are

reconciled. (2 Corinthians 5 : 18 - 19)

It is that which God does which is real: and God has reconciled us to himself in Christ.

● Christ is already our peace and our reconciliation. In Christ, the barriers are already dismantled, the hostility is already destroyed. St. Paul says:

Christ is the peace between us and has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, actually destroying in his own person the hostility. ... In his own person he killed the hostility (Ephesians 2 : 14 - 16).

It is that which God sees which is true; and God sees us in Christ and sees Christ in us. God sees us as His sons and daughters, made in His own image, remade in the image of His Son. St. Paul says:

In that image there is no room for distinction between Greek and Jew, between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, or between barbarian and Scythian, slave and freeman. There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything (Colossians 3 : 11).

Reconciliation is God's gift; it is for us to accept it. Reconciliation is God's work; it is for us to be like the Virgin Mary, to "let it be done" in us according to God's word. Reconciliation is already a reality; it is for us to let it become the reality of our daily lives and relationships and attitudes and behaviour. It is for us to shape our lives to the reconciliation which Christ has already effected, or rather to let Christ shape our lives to the existing fact of the reconciliation already accomplished, for us and without us and even in spite of us, by Christ. For us it remains to become the reconciled beings which in Christ we already are.

In Christ, the barriers dividing men and women and communities and groups from one another are already broken down, the inter-community hostility is already killed. It

follows that as we each enter into deep, silent, prayerful communion with the Christ within us, we pass beyond the barriers from below. As we, in the power of the Spirit, grow in faith and love to the full stature of the Christ within us, letting Christ live in us and be our life, we pass beyond the barriers from above. All this is God's work. As St. Paul says:

For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone and now the new one is here. (2 Corinthians 5 : 17).

"For anyone who is in Christ": that is the heart of our call to commitment; it is a call to be in Christ. Let us long to be more fully drawn into Christ. Let us draw Christ into ourselves by intense, prayerful longing. Let us draw life from Christ, as he draws life from the Father. (cfr John 6 : 57). Let us hunger for the bread which is his word, the bread which is his body, the broken bread which is his love. Let us thirst for the living water which is his Holy Spirit.

REPUDIATION OF VIOLENCE:

Violence does make reconciliation between our two communities inordinately difficult. Violence serves, and one must wonder whether it is intended to serve, to drive our two communities still further apart. But we are not dismayed. As St. John says:

We have in us

one who is greater than anyone in this world (1 John 4 : 4).

To the men and women committed to violence we say tonight, quietly and lovingly:

No matter what you do, you will not succeed in making us hate each other, or regard "the other community" as enemy, as alien, as disloyal or as not belonging.

In the words of our Belfast Declaration:

We believe that all our land belongs to God: not to Unionists or Nationalists. All of us have to live in and share it together. ...

Our differences are no excuse for refusing to seek reconciliation with God and with each other.

Let us submit our repudiation of violence to a test: do we consciously or half-consciously make a distinction between "our paramilitaries" and "their paramilitaries"? Do we find ourselves saying that violence coming from "our community" is somehow "understandable", "unavoidable", "the only argument 'they' will listen to", "the only method that gets results"? Let our rejection of violence be absolute and total. "No" is a familiar slogan in our past history and our present experience. Let our loudest "No" be said to all use of violence and all threat of violence. Let that "No" be unqualified, without conditions and without exceptions. In the words of our Declaration:

We reject the lie that justice can be achieved by the use of violence.

JUSTICE

Rejection of violence is imperative; but it is not enough. We must be committed to work for justice, justice not just for "our own community", but justice for both communities. Let us again apply a test to our concern for justice. Do we care as much about justice for "the other community" as we do about our own? Do the great social evils of unemployment and the related problem of emigration disturb us more when they affect "our own community" than when they affect "the others"? Do we dismiss the

unemployed, especially "their unemployed", as work-dodgers and welfare-scroungers?

Does it worry us that unemployment is unevenly distributed as between the two communities, between the West and East of the Bann, between the skilled and the semi-skilled and unskilled, between different social groups and occupations? Are we concerned about discrimination in employment or intimidation in the workplace, or do we dismiss these as "understandable" on "our side" and "familiar propaganda" on "their side"?

Let us take seriously the words of our Declaration:

We declare that it is the responsibility of every Christian to work for just structures in society and seek to rectify unjust acts of any kind on the part of government or society. We declare our recognition that alienation and injustice have been experienced on the part of both communities.

POLICING

Policing which is fully answerable to the law, which is impartial, professional, efficient and caring, is an essential condition of justice in any society. When policing breaks down, it is the weakest and the innocent who suffer, the aged, the housebound, the children and young people. In many areas, particularly in cities and towns, and particularly in what we used to call working class areas, which sadly now are too often pools of unemployment, ordinary policing has broken down to a disturbing extent. The result is that the quality of life has been seriously damaged, through the almost uncontrolled social epidemic of car-stealing, mugging, robbery and burglary, vandalism and general misbehaviour on the part of a lawless minority. These communities have a right in justice to normal policing.

This is made exceptionally difficult when policemen like the recently murdered Reserve Constable Nesbitt respond promptly and professionally to what purports to be a genuine call for police help, but are thereby lured into a murder trap.

Such deeds must be abhorred absolutely and condemned unconditionally by both communities. Such deeds are a massive obstacle to any hope of normal policing in areas afflicted and persecuted by criminal elements.

The RUC have undoubtedly made sincere efforts in many aspects of policing to act and to be seen to act as a professional body, impartially serving both communities. This has been at the cost of great sacrifice to themselves. Few police forces anywhere have had to operate in more difficult conditions or have suffered heavier casualties in the call of duty.

However, given the history of our society and its continuing political polarisation, impartial policing is not going to be achieved easily or quickly. It is a task demanding long hard, patient and persevering effort. There must be no slackening in that effort. The achievement of fully impartial policing is in the interests of both communities and must be the aim of both communities. It requires commitment from both communities. A better denominational balance in the membership of the force would certainly make an important contribution to this aim.

Nationalists must be ready to acknowledge the reforms which have occurred and the undoubted commitment of the RUC to continuing progress towards impartial policing. Such acknowledgement of progress, when it occurs, as well as being merited and due, will be an encouragement to further reforms and will lend more credibility to criticisms of the slowness of reform when these criticisms are deserved.

To acknowledge the undoubted efforts which the RUC have made will give them the encouragement they need and deserve, and will also signal to them that they still have a great task before them to repair historic distrust and to make themselves accepted, as they clearly wish to be accepted, as a professional force, impartially serving both traditions.

Our Declaration states:

"We declare that it is the responsibility of government to protect human life and to uphold justice and the political, economic and cultural rights of both Nationalists and Unionists without exception.

We declare that government must respect the rights of both communities and the police must impartially serve both traditions. It is the responsibility of every Christian to obey the law of the land and to support the agencies of government, including the police, in the just execution of the law's requirements, unless obedience to Christ demands otherwise.

SURSUM CORDA

As Christians we above all tonight renew our hope. Pope Leo the Great said in the fifth century:

No power on earth could ever overthrow a religion founded on the Cross of Christ.

The difficulties we face are immense, the obstacles are massive. But we Christians are the only people who can say with total certainty: "We shall not be overcome". We shall

not be overcome, because Christ, our Lord and Saviour, has overcome. He has overcome sin and evil, hatred and death. He has won the victory over defeat itself. On the Cross on Good Friday he hung, defeated, dead, disgraced, a failure in the eyes of the imperial Roman power and the Jewish establishment, a failed leader in the eyes of most of his own followers. In the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we hear the echoes of the sad disillusionment that follows the shattering of a glorious hope:

Jesus of Nazareth proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people; our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would have been the one to set Israel free ... (Luke 24 : 19 - 21).

They took the dead body down from the Cross and buried it and sealed the tomb and went away, to mourn the dying of their Master and the death of their hope. But three days later, the empty cross on the hill shone out across the land, radiant in the rising sun of Easter Day. The Cross, which had been for the Romans and the Greeks an object of infamy and for the Jews a thing of pious abhorrence, became for all future time a symbol of victory, a beacon of hope. Its victory is not victory as the world understands it, not victory as some in this community would define it, but victory through suffering, through patient endurance, through the Via Dolorosa, the Way of the Cross.

On Sunday, 29th. March next, we hope to give the united witness of our different Christian traditions to that way, Christ's Way. On that day, the cross which is to feature in the Passion Play in St. Peter's Cathedral, arrives in Belfast, having been carried all the way from Dublin by relay groups of Catholic and Protestant young people. It is first to be received in this Cathedral of St. Anne for an ecumenical service of prayer around the Cross. Then it will be carried by leaders and clergy and representatives of all the Churches along the Falls Road to St. Peter's.

This will not be an empty gesture or a happening staged for theatrical effect. It will be the sign of our commitment to follow Christ together in his suffering, to stand by him together in his dying, so that we may together share with him in his rising.

His resurrection is the solid ground of our certitude that this land of ours too will rise from its present tribulation and humiliation to share in his victory over evil and in the peace which is the gift of the Risen Lord. So we lift up our hearts this evening in the great "Sursum Corda" of the early Church. We make our own tonight the Sursum Corda of the ending of St. Mark's Gospel:

And so the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven: there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it (Mark 16 : 19 - 20).

We make our own the Sursum Corda of St. Stephen, the first martyr, who said as the fanatics stoned him:

Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand (Acts 7 : 55).

Our time is a time of trial, a time of testing of our faith and hope. But it is also the time of the "Sessio ad Dexteram Patris", the sitting of Our Lord in glory at the right hand of the Father. Whatever temporary victories evil may seem to gain here on earth, whatever dark clouds may seem to cover this land of ours, we lift up our eyes and our hearts to where Christ, our Lord, is living and reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

His is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, for ever and ever.