VIOLENCE

IN IRISH SOCIETY:
TOWARDS AN ECOLOGY OF PEACE

**The Irish Commission for
Justice and Social Affairs**
ICJSA

VERITAS

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Veritas books are printed on paper made from the wood pulp of managed forests.
For every tree felled, at least one tree is planted, thereby renewing natural resources.

FOREWORD

Violence in Irish Society: Towards an Ecology of Peace is a timely document, addressing as it does one of the most crucial issues affecting Irish society today. The Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs (ICJSA) seeks through this publication to make a positive contribution to the debate that should take place to address the current culture of violence in Ireland.

The ICJSA supports the call of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, to establish an ecology of peace. It also supports the call by Dr Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin, for a summit of all those in leadership positions in our communities to seek to address together the causes of violence, which is destroying our society and causing so much suffering to so many of our citizens. What the document suggests is noteworthy: that our response to the present culture of violence must be at both a personal level and a societal level. It is a call to recognise our indebtedness to the society to which we belong and to accept the challenge to be active citizens. It also acknowledges the destructive effects that both excessive alcohol consumption and all substance abuse have in contributing to the growth of a violent culture in our society.

I wish to thank the members of the ICJSA for their work in helping to prepare this document and for their commitment to promoting the social teaching of the Church and building a civilisation of love.

Bishop Raymond Field
Chairperson
Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs
A Commission of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference

Peace and violence cannot dwell together, and where there is violence,
God cannot be present. (cf. 1 *Chr* 22:8-9)[1]

The approach taken by the Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs (ICJSA) in this position paper is prompted by the insight of Pope Benedict XVI in his Message for World Day of Peace, 2007, which he expressed through the image of an 'ecology of peace'. In section 3, we will argue that a culture of violence will never be successfully challenged in the absence of a human and social ecology that respects both the natural and moral structure of human experience.

---

1 See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Dublin: Veritas, 2005 (henceforth *Compendium*), No. 488.

1. WE CANNOT REMAIN SILENT

THE VIOLENT FACE OF IRISH SOCIETY

While violence and the threat of violence resulting from political instability has long been a feature of life in Northern Ireland, the same could not be said of the Republic of Ireland.[2] From the early years of the Republic, which saw the introduction of an unarmed police force, up until the early 1990s, the perception was of a country with a high level of respect for authority and a low level of violent crime. Whatever the truth of this observation, even as recently as 1992, Dublin recorded the lowest rate of homicides in a list of European capital cities surveyed.[3] Furthermore, in a UN-commissioned survey of crime rates in 62 countries worldwide in the period 1998–2000, crime rates in the Republic compared favourably with the other countries surveyed.[4] However, times are changing: in the 10 years prior to 2002, recorded incidences of homicides in Dublin alone increased by 44%, while during the same period such recorded incidences decreased in all 15 European capitals surveyed.[5] That this is not simply a random deviation is confirmed in the most recent CSO statistics.[6] Overall headline crime in the Republic rose by 8% in the last two and a half years, a statistic that makes for sober reading. In Northern Ireland it was hoped that the Good Friday agreement, signed in Belfast on 10 April 1998, would initiate a new era of peace. Sadly, however, while paramilitary violence has declined considerably, it has given rise in its wake to other forms of violence.[7]

2 Analysis of the causes and impact of the violent conflict in Northern Ireland lies beyond the remit of this paper.
3 Ian O'Donnell, 'Crime and its Consequences', in T. Fahey et al., *Best of Times? The Social Impact of the Celtic Tiger*, Dublin: IPA, 2007 (henceforth *Best of Times?*), pp. 245–64.
4 Seventh UN Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice systems, covering the period 1998–2000. The figures for both the crimes of assault and rape placed Ireland in the middle of the band of nations surveyed; those for murder placed the Republic amongst those countries with the lowest recorded incidences of this crime. Up until the year 2000, by international standards the Republic recorded very low incidences of all indictable or headline crime. See 'Crime trends and public reaction', in S. Kilcommins et al., *Crime, Punishment and the Search for Order in Ireland*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2004, pp. 112–14.
5 Ian O'Donnell, 'Crime and its Consequences', *Best of Times?*, p. 253.
6 Central Statistics Office, Dublin, 28 January 2008. Findings include the following, a rise of 31% in incidences of homicide-related offences, a 61% rise in the level of murder attempts/threats and a 22% rise in headline drug offences recorded in the Republic in the fourth quarter of 2007 as compared with the corresponding period in 2006.
7 Most recent PSNI crime statistics show a steady increase in violent crime from the period 1998/99 to 2006/07. There was a rise of 2% in the overall number of reported violent crimes (this figure includes offences against the person, sexual offences and robbery) as compared with 2005/06, with a 5% rise in sexual offences. Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland 2006/07, http://www.psni.police.uk/1._recorded_crime.pdf.

VIOLENCE IN IRISH SOCIETY

Over and above the increase in the incidence of recorded violent crime is the equally worrying perception amongst a significant segment of the population that their lives are in danger. This perception is intensified by disturbing evidence of an increase in the use of knives and other potentially lethal weapons in the course of criminal behaviour, including attacks on the person. Such perceptions are conducive to the creation of a culture of fear, which impacts severely on people's quality of life. Long a feature of life in Northern Ireland, this culture of fear has not disappeared with the decline in paramilitary violence and is now spreading throughout the country as a whole. Here, we need to take cognisance of the high level of unrecorded violent crime. In the most recent CSO Victim Survey in the Republic, almost 50% of crimes of physical assault and almost 40% of incidents of violent theft went unreported to the Gardaí. Furthermore, almost 1 in 40 of those surveyed indicated that in the past year they had been the victim of one or other of these two categories of crime.[8] Although some of these crimes may not have been deemed serious enough to report to the Gardaí, one should not thereby dismiss them as of little consequence. As anyone who has been the victim of violent crime will testify, psychological scars, including a deep-seated sense of insecurity, can remain long after the physical effects have faded.

8 See the National Crime Council website (www.irlgov.ie/crimecouncil/) for comments on the findings of the Quarterly National Household Survey of Crime and Victimisation Rates (2006) conducted by the Central Statistics Office. See also the Garda Public Attitudes Survey, 2006, which can be found on the website (www.garda.ie).

THE HIDDEN FACE OF VIOLENT CRIME

It is important to be conscious of the extent to which violent crime may be hidden as a result of not being reported. Indeed, the most hidden form of violent crime is that which comes under the broad heading of domestic violence. Apart from physical violence, including sexual violence or the threat of it, domestic violence encompasses a wide variety of emotional abuse that can include: isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support, threats to one's children and control over access to money. The consequences of such violence are incalculable, not only on the abused spouse, but also on her or his children.

According to the most recent statistics in the North, the PSNI attend an incidence of domestic violence every 22 minutes, and every day 6 women and children enter a refuge because their homes are not safe.[9] So serious is the situation that in 2005 the Northern Ireland Office published a strategy for combating domestic violence and abuse.[10] The incidences of domestic violence in the South are equally unacceptable. A study by Women's Aid in the Republic in the mid-1990s found that only 1 in 5 women who experienced domestic violence ever contacted the Gardaí. In explaining this fact, one must be conscious not only of the confrontational nature of the judicial system in the courts, but also of the psychological as well as the physical difficulties in reporting the crime. It is not just the fear of not being believed, it is also the stigma and shame that is still associated with it and, in some circumstances, an unwillingness to expose the abuser whom one had once loved and may indeed still love. However, despite the underreporting of domestic violence, all the evidence points to the fact that this form of violence is widespread.[11] In the first comprehensive survey of domestic violence in the South carried out in the mid-1990s, it was found that nearly 1 in 5

9 Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, Annual Report 2005–2006, pp. 11–12.
10 Northern Ireland Office, Tackling Violence at Home: A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland Action Plan October 2005–March 2007 (2005). Available at www.nio.gov.uk.
11 See the report from the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 2 January 2008 (available at www.drcc.ie). The most detailed study of this form of violence is to be seen in *The Report of the Task Force on Violence Against Women (1997)* (available from the Government Publications office).

experienced violence at the hand of a partner or ex-partner. In the last 10 to 12 years the situation has not improved. For example, calls to the Women's Aid domestic violence helpline have increased by 50% in this period to almost 12,000, of which nearly two-thirds were from women experiencing violence from a spouse, ex-spouse, partner or ex-partner.

Another hidden and, until recently, much underreported form of violence is that inflicted on children and, in particular, the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young adults. The maiming of young life in and through the sexual abuse of children has no equal in the baleful catalogue of violent crime. That fact alone makes it difficult to accept, or even comprehend, the culture of silence that surrounded such abuse over many decades, both within the Catholic Church and within society at large. A separate but related issue is the violence that is associated with the trafficking of young women and children into the country. By highlighting the abusive nature of such activity, organisations such as Ruhama,[12] Action to Prevent Trafficking (APT)[13] and the Immigrant Council of Ireland provide a much-needed social service. It is a credit to them and other similarly motivated organisations that Irish society – North and South – can no longer plead ignorance of the extent of this type of violence.

12 Established in 1989, Ruhama is a Dublin-based NGO which works with women involved in prostitution. Ruhama (Hebrew for 'renewed life') regards prostitution and commercial sexual exploitation as violence against women and violations of women's human rights.
13 APT (Action to Prevent Trafficking) is a CORI (Conference of Religious of Ireland) – IMU (Irish Missionary Union) initiative.

The phrase 'violence begets violence' is a truism. It needs restating, however, if for no other reason than to alert us to yet another instance of what might be described as hidden and in some cases, non-physical, forms of violence that in turn create the conditions within which more serious violence can occur. Here, one is reminded of the reality of bullying, which not only blights the lives of so many children, but which is an all too real dimension of the daily working lives of many adults.

In extreme cases, there is a link between bullying and that most tragic form of violence that is suicide, which causes such heartbreak for families involved.[14] There are many other such manifestations of violence within our society, among them: sectarianism, various forms of anti-social behaviour and racism.[15] Finally, there is the violence linked to the experience of poverty or social deprivation.

14 One of the areas generating most concern in the Republic is the phenomenon of young adult male suicides. At 20.4% (per 100,000) in the 20–24 age group, this figure is high by international standards. However, there is some evidence of a recent decline in this rate. See WHO suicide statistics (www.who.int). Recent data on suicides in Northern Ireland give considerable cause for concern. In an address to the Assembly (5/7/07), the Minister for Health Michael McGimpsey announced that last year the number of those taking their own lives rose alarmingly to 291, nearly double the averages recorded between 2000 and 2004. (Men under 35 years make up 40% of that figure.) Source: *The Irish Times*, 6 July 2007.

15 Despite recent tragic examples of the effects of racist violence, the incidence of racism in the Republic is nevertheless considerably less than in other EU countries. (See Gerard Hughes et al., 'The Impact of Immigration', *Best of Times?*, pp. 217–44.) Unfortunately, this is not the case in Northern Ireland where racism has been and continues to be a major problem. As recently as the year ending 31 March 2006 there was an increase of 15% in racist incidents reported to the PSNI (source: *Belfast Telegraph* 16, October 2006). In addition, in a Northern Ireland Assembly debate on racial equality 3/7/07, it was reported that the numbers of racist incidents continues to rise – 936 incidents in the past year, double the total for the previous two years (source: *The Irish Times*, 4 July 2007).

SILENCE IS NOT AN OPTION

In the face of this reality, and indeed the increase in the incidences of violent crime, alongside the sobering fact that many of the perpetrators are only youths, a voice of protest must be raised. In this respect, the legacy of recently documented clerical sex abuse and the culture of silence in the institutional church that accompanied it is a telling reminder to all that silence is not an option. Furthermore, although it is the unique responsibility of the State to design laws to combat violent crime, the Church nevertheless cannot remain on the sidelines in the ongoing struggle against this evil. 'In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord recalls the commandment, "You shall not kill", and adds to it the proscription of anger, hatred and vengeance. Going further, Christ asks his disciples to turn the other cheek, to love their enemies.'[16] The mandate of the Gospel demands that we speak out against violence in all its manifestations and in particular, against any cultural acquiescence in the face of what might be described as 'acceptable levels of violence', associated for the most part with gangland criminals. All human life is sacred[17] and the thinly masked class bias that tolerates gangland violence cannot be ignored. Finally, it is for the Church, in partnership with all those concerned with the common good, to reflect on the nature of peace and the steps necessary to promote a just and peaceful society. This brief position paper from the ICJSA is designed to contribute to this work by reflecting on ways in which the social and community infrastructure need to be transformed if violence is to be successfully tackled.

---

16 *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* section 2262 (henceforth CCC).
17 See CCC, section 2258.

MOVING BEYOND A CULTURE OF FEAR

Fear is an understandable reaction to an experience as frightening as violence and will never be assuaged without much support from neighbours and friends in the local community – support that acknowledges both the physical and psychological scars inflicted by crimes of violence. Even for those who have never been subject to a violent assault, fear of violence can seriously undermine the quality of life. Here, one thinks in particular of those living alone in rural parts of Ireland where fear of violence plays no small part in heightening their sense of isolation and vulnerability.

The difficulty arises, however, when we choose to remain in that fear and not make the connection with the deeper questions about our values and our everyday choices. Analysis that starts and ends in an experience of fear is futile. We can react from fear and legislate accordingly, promoting tougher sentences for violent crime or tougher bail conditions for violent criminals. We can generate fear by continually telling ourselves fearsome stories of violence which cause us to seek to live in gated apartment blocks, ghettos that serve to fragment our society. We can seek to corral violence at the margins of our experience – something that affects me only as a victim or as an observer rather than as a witness or an enabler. We can seek to categorise the perpetrators of violence and, in some cases, the victims of violence as gangland killers and drug dealers – to be treated almost as aliens with whom one has nothing in common. We can live in a fear that disempowers us and prevents us from closing the gap between an acceptance of our present fractured society as inevitable and any belief that we may have in the inherent dignity of all human beings. Or we can face the realities of our modern world and seek to confront issues such as violence through those very values that affirm our shared membership of society and the rights and responsibilities that flow from that membership. A response that is more than reactionary, one that can indeed move beyond fear, one that involves difficult choices at societal, community and personal level, is in fact the only really useful way forward.

VIOLENCE IN IRISH SOCIETY

2. ADDRESSING THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

REACTIVE VIOLENCE

Obviously, the first step to combating violence is to seek to understand and to identify the causes of this most destructive mode of behaviour. This is by no means an easy task. The challenge to understand the causes of violence embraces the related issues of freedom and personal responsibility – the challenge to live a moral life. It also includes what one might describe as reactive violence. In this context, one is inevitably drawn into the complex world of human motivation and the part therein that is played by role models. In a cultural context wherein the media provides such a powerful array of role models for young people, it is clearly of the first importance to be sensitive to the manner in which violence is depicted by the different organs of the media. There are many ways in which to bestow celebrity status on violent criminals or to glamorise violent behaviour. These include the proliferation of television serials that glamorise 'Godfather' type criminals, the extensive marketing of a wide spectrum of violent video games and the habit amongst some newspaper headline writers to refer to well-known criminals by their 'pet' names. Whatever forms the glamorisation of violence takes, one should be under no illusion about the extent to which it contributes to the toleration of a culture of violence.

The term 'reactive violence' acknowledges a causal relationship between violence and a deficient educational, social and community infrastructure. In particular, it stresses the link between social deprivation and crime, something that is there for everybody to see, both in the make-up of our island's prison population and, even more tragically, in the lists of those young adults who have died in violent gangland feuds.

Violence in Irish Society

However, while acknowledging that much violence is reactive, it is nevertheless important in the Irish context not to presume a simple correlation between levels of poverty and instances of violent crime. Apart from the fact that it would be highly offensive to those on modest incomes to suggest that they are more prone to violence than those who are relatively well off, it is also misleading. For example, despite the high levels of unemployment in the Republic 20 years ago, the instances of violent crime in the late 1980s compare very favourably with the most recent published figures.

A more fruitful approach to understanding reactive violence would be to examine the possibility of a link between increasing levels of violence and the existence of high levels of relative poverty in Ireland, North and South.[18] As a concept, relative poverty embraces, not only income inequality, but also the power imbalances that we tolerate, where system-designs and organisational cultures restrict access to modes of participation such as being able to gain access to relevant information or being able to make decisions relevant to one's self or community. These power imbalances can lead those thus disadvantaged to perceive themselves as outsiders in their own society.

The persistently high levels of relative poverty that Irish society currently tolerates must be seen against the backdrop of a growing individualist and consumerist lifestyle. In such a cultural ethos the poor suffer twice because, in the eyes of some, not only do material possessions measure a person's wealth but they also measure their worth. Thus, it is hardly surprising that societal acceptance of high levels of income inequality has the potential to give rise to justifiable anger amongst those who are thus doubly disadvantaged.

---

18 Ireland not only remains in the group of countries with relatively high levels of inequality in the EU/OECD, but this gap has if anything widened during the past 10 to 15 years. Based on the figure for the UK, inequality levels in Northern Ireland are only marginally better than in the Republic. See Brian Nolan and Bertrand Maître, 'Economic Growth and Income Inequality: Setting the Context', *Best of Times?*, p. 41.

It may be difficult to quantify the precise causal relationship between violent behaviour and feelings of exclusion or the perception of being an outsider. It would, however, be foolish to ignore the existence of such a link, since the feeling of belonging or not, as the case may be, raises issues that touch on the deepest roots of identity and self-esteem. Forms of societal malfunction, such as is reflected in the existence of a drug culture and in high rates of suicide amongst young adult males, have every opportunity to flourish where a community is fragmented and a substantial segment of the population believes that they have little or no stake in society.

If this is the case, it is not easy to avoid the conclusion that there are very few levels of society that can be absolved from some share of responsibility for the existence of a violent culture. It is not just the power imbalances that we tolerate, but it is also the effect of everyday choices that we make in areas such as health and education.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

From a very different perspective, the challenge to understand the causes of violence embraces the issue of the manner in which we as human beings respond in freedom to the challenge to live a moral life. An over-emphasis on what can be described as reactive violence, whose causes are attributed to structural/societal injustice, can suggest a rather utopian solution to violence that takes little account of the painful reality of personal sin, which 'wounds the nature of man [sic] and injures human solidarity'.[19]

19 CCC, section 1849.

In attempting to understand violence we must not run the risk of excusing it. Apart from those with severe psychological conditions that seriously limit personal freedom, the majority of those whose lives are scarred by the effects of social deprivation do not embrace violence. Furthermore, by exclusively focusing on the effects of societal inequity, one runs the risk of detracting from the reality of so-called 'middle-class crime', whose causes cannot be laid at the door of structural injustice or social deprivation. This is particularly evident in the case of domestic violence, violence resulting from the abuse of alcohol, corruption, tax evasion, fraud and also the demand for 'sexual services', incidences of which cross all social and economic boundaries.
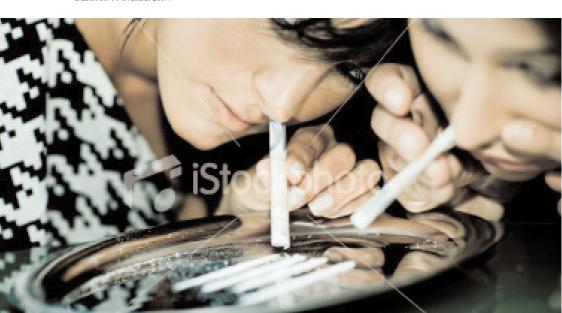
The link between alcohol abuse and violent behaviour needs little introduction, as the effects of such abuse are all too evident in Irish society today. It does, however, raise serious questions about the extent to which we, as a society, are prepared to accept personal responsibility for the effects of our behaviour – the effects of the choices that we make in respect of our consumption of alcohol. In addition, questions have to be asked about the high level of tolerance that currently exists in Ireland for those who abuse alcohol.[20] There are also issues that cannot be avoided surrounding below-cost selling of alcohol and the manner in which alcohol is currently marketed. Personal responsibility extends beyond those who abuse alcohol – in many cases young adults and teenagers. For far too long, Irish people have tolerated high levels of alcohol consumption. If we are to make any inroads in the struggle against violence there needs to be, at every level of society, a renewed commitment to breaking the link that connects 'being Irish' to alcohol.

20 See the following comment from Archbishop Diarmuid Martin (15/11/07): 'There is a double standard in our society about alcohol. Unruly drunkenness is looked down upon. But for some, excessive alcohol consumption is respectable, just as cocaine consumption for some seems to be fashionable. We convince ourselves that there are unfortunate alcoholics who are sick; then there are the other drinkers that do not really have a problem. Yes, on occasion they may be heavy drinkers; occasionally or even more often they go beyond their limit; if this happens at some form of "celebration", they may even boast about it …' Address delivered on the occasion of the launch of the Bishop's Drug and Alcohol Initiative, *Finding the Balance: Dare to Believe.*

Violence in Irish Society

What can be said about the link between alcohol abuse and violent behaviour is even more so the case in respect of the consumption of illegal drugs. Furthermore, in the light of the fact that so much of violent crime in Ireland today is drug-related, one must frankly acknowledge that the drug culture is not sustained merely by the greed of violent criminals. Rather, it is the increasing levels of 'recreational' drug abuse amongst the economically relatively well-off segment of the population that provides such a lucrative market for the current trade in illicit drugs. As has recently been observed, 'illicit drug consumption cannot be sanitised out of the equation'. Those who engage in so called 'recreational' drug abuse cannot be absolved from accepting some share of responsibility for the violent face of Irish society.[21]

21 See the following passage from Archbishop Diarmuid Martin's homily (4/11/07): 'The drug trade is in its own right violence, a trafficking in death and the ruination of lives, many of them young and vulnerable. Violence and the drug trade belong intrinsically together. Illicit drug consumption cannot be sanitised out of that equation. I find it particularly difficult to understand how in a society which rightly abhors any expression of double-standards in public life, there are those who attempt to make germ-free the bond between the sordid network of drug trafficking and violence and the socially accepted use of certain drugs as "recreational". Double standards about the drug trade can never be made politically correct. It is certainly not socially correct. It is not correct for society.' Delivered on the occasion of the Citizenship Service in Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin on 4 November 2007.

3. TOWARDS AN ECOLOGY OF PEACE

In his 2007 World Day of Peace address, Pope Benedict XVI focused on the link between the promotion of peace and respect for the person. In this context, he spoke of the importance of promoting what he described as 'an ecology of peace', a human and social ecology that respects both the natural and moral structure of human experience. As he said, 'experience shows that disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence, and vice versa'.[22] It is undoubtedly the case that where there is disregard for the environment, including specifically the social infrastructure, violence flourishes. The Irish situation is a case in point. While one can point to the problems of accelerated urbanisation, it is also arguable that we are only now reaping the legacy of decades of irresponsible planning, or the neglect of planning, where decisions were made, at least partly, to avoid difficult issues. The net effect of such neglect was that little effort was devoted to ensuring that the urban environment promoted an ethos of respect for those living in the locality.

Prompted by this insight of Pope Benedict XVI, expressed through the idea of an ecology of peace, we will argue in this section that a culture of violence will never be successfully challenged in the absence of a human and social ecology that respects both the natural and moral structure of human experience.

22 Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace Address, 2007, section 8.

THE IMPORTANCE
OF THE FAMILY

The solidity of the family nucleus is a decisive resource for the quality of life in society, therefore the civil community cannot remain indifferent to the destabilising tendencies that threaten its foundations at their very roots.[23]

When all is said and done, the family is one of the key protections against the fragmentation of society in which violence thrives. Over and above all other issues, this highlights the importance of working to strengthen and support family bonds that provide for a sense of belonging and self-esteem that is essential for healthy living. In this context, we must acknowledge the very real sacrifices that parents make for the sake of their children – sacrifices that also contribute to the transmission of moral values. Likewise, we must give recognition to agencies such as ACCORD – Catholic Marriage Care Service,[24] which works to support marriage and the family.

However one might assess the current status of the family in Ireland today, what is striking is the importance that Irish people (North and South) attach to the family and family values. Not only are the Irish markedly more pro-family than most of their European neighbours, but also no other broad domain of life is accorded such a degree of importance.[25] Furthermore, the family is afforded constitutional recognition in Bunreacht na hÉireann, Article 41. The commitment to the importance of the family can also be seen in the divorce figures both

23 *Compendium,* No. 229
24 ACCORD is a voluntary Catholic organisation that aims to promote a deeper understanding of Christian marriage and to offer people the means to safeguard and nourish their marriage and family relationships.
25 European values study (EVS) survey 2000. See *Conflict and Consensus*, pp. 118–21.

North and South, which remain low by European standards. However, the situation is changing. Increasingly it is the pragmatism of a consumerist worldview that provides the lens through which all relationships are viewed, and such an environment is not conducive to the promotion of an ideal such as life-long fidelity. This cultural reality goes some way to explaining the rather worrying statistic that upwards of 12% of all children in the Republic are living in one-parent families.[26] Furthermore, as is increasingly the case in the Ireland of today, both parents work outside the home. Add to this the increasingly long commutes to work and the conditions are created for the existence of a whole range of formal care arrangements for children outside of the family environment. Finally, our culture is one in which children have the affluence, the space and the technology to create their own virtual families.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND VIOLENCE: THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL GUIDANCE

What's engraved in stone can't easily be changed. What's engraved in childhood is engraved in stone.[27]

What must never be forgotten is that no one is born violent; violence is learned and the earliest learning environment for most young people is the home. While not all criminality is linked to the absence of a secure family environment, there are few who deny that such circumstances often create the

---

26 Philip O'Connell et al., 'Employment and the Quality of Work', *Best of Times?*, p. 45.
27 President Mary McAleese, quoted in the keynote address by Marie Murray at a seminar on *Violence in Society: A Christian Response*, hosted by the Dublin Archdiocese's Women's Forum, 13 November 2004. See www.dublindiocese.ie, under Press Releases – Reports.

conditions within which alcohol and drug abuse thrive and criminality breeds. In this context, one cannot overestimate the importance of promoting good parenting skills – of working to ensure that children are brought up in a loving environment with clearly defined moral boundaries. The alternative, all too common in today's society, is one in which children are being educated by television and exposed to the media's glamorisation of violence without being taught the values that would help protect them from its negative influence. We are all creatures of habit and if, for lack of parental guidance and control, children are not educated to understand and respect boundaries that place limits on what is acceptable behaviour, it becomes increasingly difficult to rectify this deficiency in adulthood.

In light of the importance of this issue, we need to do everything in our power to support family life, whether it is by promoting family-friendly work practices or by providing intensive family support for parents as well as children who need it – particularly for those who experience violence in the home and where there is evidence in a child of early aggressive behaviour or social, cognitive or information-processing deficits. If we are to begin to tackle the scourge of youth violence, we will only do so if we as a society promote and support parenthood and child rearing through carefully crafted and fully funded programmes.

The Church also has a responsibility in this regard; there is a need to support parents at parish level through mother and toddler groups, mentoring, preparation for parenting with young pregnant mothers, and valuing parents and parenting by engaging with the wisdom of the older generation.[28] Above all, in and through the promotion of family values, Gospel teaching and linking the home, school and the parish community, the Church in partnership with teachers, youth workers and community activists can help to engender the confidence and self-belief to work to build a 'civilization of love' that is grounded in respect for the other as a neighbour.[29] If society can be empowered to adhere to such a vision, it will find the resources to challenge the disfunctionality that gives rise to violent behaviour.

PROMOTING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Faced as we are with the rise in violent behaviour in our society, it is imperative to understand the links, on the one hand, between that violence and the conviction rightly or wrongly, that Ireland is becoming a two-tier society and, on the other, between the promotion of active citizenship and an ecology of peace. It may be difficult to quantify the precise causal relationship between violent behaviour and feelings of exclusion, but given the high levels of drug abuse amongst the lowest socio-economic segment of the population one should not dismiss this hypothesis too easily. In this context, we welcome the development of a national drugs strategy and the appointment of a Minister with special responsibility for addressing the problem of the misuse of drugs in the Republic. However, all efforts to combat this societal scourge, which

28 See the recommendations of the Women's Forum, *Violence in Society: A Christian Response*.
29 *Compendium*, No. 582. 'Human relationships cannot be governed solely according to the measure of justice … Only a humanity in which there reigns the "civilization of love" will be able to enjoy authentic and lasting peace.'

contributes so much to the culture of violence, will fail unless the underlying problem of social exclusion is comprehensively addressed. The attempt to explain violent behaviour by highlighting its reactive nature – as a form of protest against a violation of individual rights – needs to be balanced by an acknowledgement that with rights come responsibilities. The attempt to delineate human beings simply as individuals with inalienable rights does not do justice to the full truth, because it ignores the manner in which we have been nurtured in and through our membership of a multitude of overlapping communities. As members of a society, a local community and a family, all of us have rights, but equally we have responsibilities. These are not co-terminus with our duty to be law-abiding citizens. We can and must speak about the duty of active citizenship, which is nothing more than an honest acknowledgement of our indebtedness to the society to which we belong. In practical terms, this concept of active citizenship translates into an

attitude of solidarity to our fellow citizens, an attitude that is marked by 'a willingness to give oneself for the good of one's neighbour, beyond any individual or particular interest'.[30] An increasing recognition of the importance of promoting active citizenship in the Republic was underlined in the decision by the Irish Government in April 2006 to establish the Task Force on Active Citizenship.[31]

CREATING AN ETHOS OF VOLUNTARY SERVICE

The role of government in putting in place structures that can help to combat the scourge of violence in society should never be underestimated. Nevertheless, it is far too easy to lay the finger of blame for the rise of violence solely at the door of the failures of successive governments. No government can legislate for virtue, and yet there are few who could doubt that virtue, at both a personal and societal level, has a key role to play in creating a moral environment that alone is capable of challenging the legitimacy of a violent culture.[32] Furthermore, it is only through the promotion of the social virtues that we become capable of generating an ethos of solidarity in society, an ethos 'which favour[s] togetherness, and which teach[es] us to live in unity so as to build in unity, by giving and receiving'.[33] The virtue of solidarity is marked by a joint acceptance of responsibility for the common good. It is in this commitment to the common good that are sown the seeds of active citizenship that alone can counter a fragmentation of society or the local community.

---

30 See *Compendium*, No. 194.
31 Copies of the report and all relevant supporting documents can be accessed from the website of the Task Force on Active Citizenship: www.activecitizen.ie.
32 See the following passage from Archbishop Diarmuid Martin's homily on the occasion of the Mass on the commencement of the Michaelmas Law Term, 1 October 2007: '… a world based on law and rules alone would not necessarily generate virtue or goodness. The law has its role to play in setting standards of behaviour; … but on its own it will not create a virtuous society.' Further in the same homily he states, 'In Irish society there are many movements in the process of redefining and giving new impetus to what is called active citizenship. Families, schools, and churches and volunteer organisations coalesce into communities: they cement the fabric of society and become the primary agents for supporting and transmitting the values which knit us together. Where, working with government and local authorities, communities are enhanced and empowered, they will find the courage to reject false values and build "pro-social" behaviour, behaviour that fosters the building of social virtue.'
33 *Compendium*, No. 203.

Flowing from this virtue of solidarity stems recognition of the importance of promoting an ethos of voluntary service both in the local community and in the larger society. Christians would argue that it is in the true nature of humans to be generous and that much of the volunteering we find in our communities is a spontaneous expression of what is best about humans. Whatever the truth of that conviction, it is unarguable that such

an ethos is the indispensable bedrock of active citizenship and without it any pride in the local community or even any sense of community living is at best ephemeral. The increasingly individualistic and highly competitive culture in which we live is not conducive to fostering a spirit of volunteerism and community engagement. While the most recent evidence does not lend credence to the widespread perception of a falling off in the practice of community voluntary work,[34] nevertheless there is a compelling need to put in place support services that will

[34] The 2006 ESRI Survey commissioned by the Taskforce confirms that 29% of all adults were 'actively involved in any type of voluntary or community group in the last 12 months'. This is in fact an increase on the comparable 2002 figure of 21.7%. In this respect, the Republic is about average or above average for European countries. See Statistical Evidence for Active Citizenship in Ireland http://www.activecitizen.ie. The most recent comparative study of levels of volunteerism on the island of Ireland based on the 2000 EVS survey found little difference between the Republic and Northern Ireland, although levels of participation in voluntary activities in the South were slightly higher than in the North. See T. Fahey, B. Hayes and R. Sinnott, *Conflict and Consensus: A Study of Values and Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2005 (henceforth *Conflict and Consensus*), pp. 180–4.

enhance the contribution of the volunteer sector to the health of society.[35] In this context, we should not underestimate the importance of the dedicated work for the youth of Ireland of the many sporting organisations.

Thousands of young men and women throughout the length and breadth of Ireland generously give of their time to working voluntarily in youth and community activities. They make an immense contribution to creating a positive educational and recreational environment that is by far the most effective tool in the struggle to combat a culture of youth violence. In this context, one should give generous recognition to those youth and community organisations in the voluntary sector which give young adults the opportunity to make a contribution in this area. Many of these organisations, such as CYC (Catholic Youth Care),[36] Youth Work Ireland[37] and the various scouting organisations, North and South, are inspired by the Christian ideal of solidarity. In meeting the challenge of educating children and young adults in the importance of the social virtues[38] there is nothing more powerful than the concrete witness to this ideal offered by the many young voluntary youth workers.

Sporting organisations, youth and community groups, and all others with an educative role have a privileged opportunity to imbue in both children and young adults a sense of what it is to be a member of a local community. In this context, the Irish Government's acceptance of the Taskforce's recommendation for an expansion of the education for citizenship programme is to be welcomed.[39] However, it must be frankly acknowledged that for far too long governments in both Northern Ireland and the Republic have relied on the voluntary character of sport,

35 The Report of the Task Force on Active Citizenship (March 2007), pp. 15–23 contains a detailed list of valuable recommendations, two of which deserve special mention: (1) 'that the group insurance scheme open to members of Local Community and Voluntary Fora should be promoted widely amongst relevant organisations and groups' and (2) 'that funding schemes be strengthened to support capacity development amongst community and voluntary organisations particularly in the area of training at both national and local level'.

36 Catholic Youth Care is a Dublin diocesan agency whose aim is to promote a youth work response that is caring, compassionate and Christian with a view to enabling young people to participate more fully in the life of society and church.

37 Youth Work Ireland (formerly the National Youth Federation) is one of the Republic's largest youth organisations. It supports and co-ordinates a range of frontline services to and with young people around the country delivered by 22 local (mainly Catholic diocesan) voluntary youth services.

38 See *Compendium*, No. 242, which speaks of the critical importance of cultivating in children the fundamental virtues of justice and charity.

39 The following recommendations from the Taskforce that have been accepted by the Government are to be welcomed: (1) 'the expansion of education for citizenship in the school system and in the youth and adult education sectors'; (2) 'a certificate/award which would be earned through completing at least three months volunteering or community involvement activity (in Ireland or overseas)'. See 'Taskforce on Active Citizenship Report published – Government accepts recommendations', www.activecitizen.ie.

youth and community organisations and failed to ensure that their work is properly resourced. If society is to tackle youth violence with any chance of success, this attitude must change.

Practical initiatives designed to promote an ethos of voluntary service and active citizenship, such as that provided by the President of Ireland's annual Gaisce awards and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards in Northern Ireland, are to be encouraged. In this regard, we welcome the Irish Government's commitment to implementing the recommendation of the Task Force on Active Citizenship to institute National Presidential Citizen Awards 'to recognise outstanding contributions to civic and community life'.[40] A similarly laudable approach is to be found in the mission statement of the Northern Ireland Department for Social Development in its strategy for Neighbourhood renewal: 'Together, tackling disadvantage, building communities.'[41] The spirit of these initiatives needs to be replicated in every local community throughout the land.

FOSTERING PARTNERSHIP

For far too long, Irish society – North and South – tolerated a situation where new cities, towns and large housing estates were built with scant regard for the need to ensure that critical social infrastructures were put in place. Not only do the employment, health and educational needs of the community need to be addressed, but equally importantly, their recreational, social and cultural requirements must be provided for. If respect for the person is the *sine qua non* for combating violence and promoting a peaceful society, then the challenge facing both governments is clear. Irrespective of impending budgetary constraints, they must ensure that priority is given to upgrading the social infrastructure of our urban disadvantaged communities, and that they do so in a manner that ensures the right of the local community to be a partner in this process is fully respected.

40 Ibid.
41 Department for Social Development Northern Ireland, *People and Place: A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (2003). Available at www.dsdni.gov.uk

The Neighbourhood Renewal strategy for Northern Ireland, launched by the Department for Social Development in 2003, represents an effort to tackle disadvantage by targeting four main areas: (1) encouraging investment and physical regeneration; (2) raising educational achievement; (3) improving access to employment; and (4) creating safe, healthy communities.[42] Similarly, in the Republic, specifically the Ballymun regeneration project in Dublin and the upcoming regeneration of the Moyross and Southhill areas of Limerick, there is evidence of a consciousness on the part of Government of the critical importance of this issue. Indeed, the proposals contained in the recently published plan to address social disadvantage in these areas of Limerick are to be commended. These include: one-to-one support for children with educational problems, intensive family support for parents who need it and bringing health and employment services closer to the community. However, if we are to create a society, North and South, where people feel safe and are not intimidated in their homes, much more needs to be done. Justice demands such an approach, and society cannot afford the alternative.

Anti-social behaviour thrives in a society where local communities are fragmented, and nothing is more guaranteed to thwart the process of community building than to ignore their legitimate mandate. Thus, facilitating local communities to become partners in the process of urban regeneration is of the first importance in creating the conditions to combat a culture of violence. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that, no matter how much resources are targeted at increasing the number of Gardaí or PSNI, law enforcement on its own will never successfully challenge a violent culture. Violence will only be overcome by the mobilisation of communities. The challenge for the governments, therefore, is not only to put in place resources to ensure an increase in Gardaí/PSNI presence in the area but more importantly to set up the structures that will ensure that this policing is truly community policing.

42 Ibid.

Most importantly, the challenge is also to establish structures that promote local democracy and accountability while fostering active citizenship through the provision of practical support for the community-building activities of local schools, churches and voluntary organisations.

CONCLUSION

Violence is not a problem that admits of any easy or quick-fix solutions. While we all have a contribution to make to create the conditions that will mitigate violence, there is a sense in which violence will always be with us because it is a product of sin. Nevertheless, as the late Pope John Paul II stated,

> in spite of the heritage of sin, and the sin which each one is capable of committing – there exists in the human person sufficient qualities and energies, a fundamental 'goodness', because he [sic] is the image of the Creator, placed under the redemptive influence of Christ, who 'united himself in some fashion with every man [sic]', and because the efficacious action of the Holy Spirit 'fills the earth'.[43]

In responding to the scourge of violence in Ireland today there is indeed no justification for either despair or pessimism – and even less for inertia. If nothing else, we have a responsibility to educate ourselves in non-violent strategies for resolving conflict. In this context, one can only commend both the work of Irish Aid, which has taken conflict resolution as a primary pillar of Irish Development Policy, and also the work of non-governmental organisations such as Pax Christi,[44] which is committed to the promotion of conflict resolution through non-violent means. Not only do they work to promote a non-violent ethos in society, but they also challenge the legitimacy of the 'business of violence' that underpins much of the arms industry.

43 Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, par. 47
44 Pax Christi is a Catholic Peace Movement with national sections in all continents. Its activities are mainly related to the issues of security and disarmament; human rights; East–West relations; North–South relations; peace education; peace spirituality; non-violence; faith, dialogue and reconciliation; integrity of creation.

Violence in Irish Society

We fully support Archbishop Diarmuid Martin in his repeated call for a 'summit of community leaders' to tackle what he has called the scourge of violence in society. We urge those in leadership positions in our community at local and national level, to respond positively to his call as a matter of urgency and for the good of our society.

In addition, the ICJSA suggests that on a personal level we:

- Recognise that our response to violence often distinguishes between certain categories of victim, regarding certain deaths, such as those of gangland criminals, as less serious. All human life is sacred and the thinly masked class bias that tolerates these distinctions cannot be ignored;
- Accept that those of us who have benefited from the society in which we live have a particular responsibility to contribute through active citizenship;
- Acknowledge the responsibility of 'recreational' drug users for the violence that is associated with a lucrative trade in illicit drugs.

On a societal level we call on the Government and those in leadership in our communities to:

- Support family life by promoting family-friendly work practices;
- Provide intensive family support for those parents as well as children who need it;
- Promote and support parenthood and child rearing through carefully crafted and fully funded programmes;
- Give priority to supporting the work of the voluntary youth sector, which makes an immense contribution to creating a positive educational and recreational environment for young people;
- Seek to ban violent videos and electronic games aimed particularly at young people that promote a culture of violence.
- Acknowledge that in the struggle against violence there must be a renewed commitment to breaking the link that connects Irish identity to alcohol consumption;

- Create an awareness of the harmful effects that both excessive alcohol consumption and all substance abuse have in promoting a culture of violence in our society;
- Encourage practical initiatives designed to promote an ethos of voluntary service and active citizenship at all levels of society;
- Give priority to upgrading the social infrastructure of our urban disadvantaged communities, and ensure that the right of the local community to be a partner in this process is fully respected.

We cannot underestimate the seriousness of the challenge of countering the rise of a violent culture in Ireland today. There are far too many people living amongst us whose lives have been ruined by the terrible effects of violence. This short position paper from the ICJSA does not contain anything like a definitive analysis of the issue – more an exploration of the signs of the times. It is written as an invitation to dialogue and to raise consciousness of the complexity of the issues involved. The demands of a commitment to the common good ask nothing less.

Finally, and most importantly, we ask that we commit ourselves anew to promoting and to living the Gospel values of justice, love and peace, and so help to build a 'civilisation of love' in our communities throughout the whole island of Ireland.