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RECENT EVENTS IN WEST BELFAST:  
THE CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE

STATEMENT BY BISHOP CAHAL B. DALY  
OF DOWN AND CONNOR

22nd March 1988

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The ugly face of republican violence was unveiled before the world last Saturday in Andersonstown, just as the ugly face of loyalist violence was revealed to the world on the previous Wednesday in Milltown Cemetery. It is the republican violence which dismays Catholics most, because it was particularly brutish, and because it happened in the midst of a Catholic community in West Belfast and on the occasion of a funeral.

First I wish to offer my sympathy to the parents and relatives and friends of the two young soldiers, Corporals Derek Woods and David Howes, who were done to death in such a horrifying fashion. I offer my sympathy to Janine Whitehouse, the heart-broken fiancée of Corporal Howes. My telephone has been inundated with messages of sorrow and of sympathy to them all. All over Ireland, people are praying for them and praying that all this murdering hate may cease.

I also offer my deep sympathy to the good Catholic people of West Belfast, who have been so unjustly misrepresented to the world by the barbarous behaviour of a few. Very many Catholics have been in touch with me since Saturday, expressing their outrage and shame that such awful things could be done within our Catholic community. The Catholic people of West Belfast have already suffered more than most communities through the past twenty years. The frightful scenes of that black Saturday have inflicted on them a new and special form of pain and hurt and wrong. Many have expressed to me their sense of helplessness and near despair at the evil forces which have been released within their community and which are opposed to everything that Catholics believe and cherish.

I ask the Catholic people of West Belfast not to be discouraged. Their faith and prayer and their sheer Christian goodness will overcome this evil. Our Lord says to them:  
Do not be afraid; only have faith. (Mark 5 : 37)

Courage, I am with you; do not be afraid. (Mark 6 : 50)

St. John says:

He that is in you  
is greater than anyone who is in the world. (cfr. John 4 : 4)

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

Out of this evil good may still come, if it brings everyone to realise anew that there can be no half measures where evil is concerned. Evil must be rejected totally and unequivocally. There must be no ambivalence, no double standards, no selective indignation. The Irish Bishops said last November:

There is no room for ambivalence. In face of the present campaigns of republican violence the choice of all Catholics is clear. It is a choice between good and evil.

It is sinful to join organisations committed to violence or to remain in them. It is sinful to support such organisations or to call on others to support them. ...

...People must choose. There is no longer any room for romantic illusion. There is no excuse for thinking that the present violence in Ireland can be morally justified.

In face of these recent crimes let us redouble our prayers that the Lord will remove the veil from the eyes of those who will not see and bring about in all hearts a true spirit of repentance.

The words are more relevant than ever after last week.

#### THE EVIL OF HATRED

IRA violence is often disguised with a mask of romantic rhetoric and militaristic mock ritual. For a ghastly half hour on Saturday, the mask slipped. The real face of IRA violence was shown, and it was horrible to see.

Behind Saturday's events there almost certainly was an element of fear of another loyalist attack like that of Milltown Cemetery a few days earlier. Then the manic force of the elemental lust to kill took over. But let us not be deceived. This was not a momentary lapse from high IRA principles and standards. People would not have taken iron bars in their hands to batter soldiers into unconsciousness, if they had not first taken hatred into their hearts. That hatred is fostered and fanned by the propaganda of the IRA and its political supporters. Hatred and murder are close akin. He that hates has already murdered his brother or sister in his heart. Our first need is to rid ourselves of all the roots of political hatred embedded in our hearts. Love, not hatred, is the only worthy motive of the struggle for justice.

#### THE EVIL OF MURDER

In the scenes in Andersonstown, we saw murder in all its sub-human viciousness. Most IRA murders are carefully and coldly planned in advance and carried out with scientific precision. Let us not forget that those murders are not less evil than the Andersonstown barbarity. They are actually more morally evil than Andersonstown, because they have the added moral guilt of deliberate premeditation.

Let last Saturday's events awaken us all to the brutal reality which any murder is. The greatest harm which the IRA does to the Catholic community is the spiritual harm which it does in weakening the sense of the sacredness and inviolability of human life and blunting awareness of the awfulness of murder. Particularly frightening is the effect of all this on the moral sense of children and the young. This has fearful consequences for the future of our community.

Condemnation of the IRA is not a political matter; it is a spiritual one. The IRA constitutes a grave spiritual danger for sections of the Catholic community. Our Lord said:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. (Matthew 10 : 28).

The activities of the IRA are killing the soul of those involved in it or actively supporting it.

I want to plead with the leaders of that organisation and with those who have influence over them. I want to address a direct plea to them, in the name of God and for the honour of the Irish people, to bring this killing to an end.

I want to plead with those who joined the organisation in the past for idealistic reasons and out of a passion for justice. I ask them now to have the honesty and the courage to recognise that their involvement has forced them to do and to approve of and to defend deeds which would have revolted them when they first joined. For God's sake, for Ireland's sake, let them leave the organisation now before still more grievous harm is done to their conscience and their soul and to our community and our country. Let them turn to peaceful and constructive ways of promoting justice and peace and defending human rights.

To those whom animal passion and the spirit of evil swept away on last Saturday, I say, do not ever despair of God's mercy and forgiveness; repent and turn back to God and be reconciled to Him and to the community which you have so grievously wronged.

#### WHAT CAN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY DO?

Many Catholics have been asking me over the weekend what the Catholic community can do to atone for what happened on Saturday? I offer some suggestions:

##### 1. Prayer

Prayer is our greatest weapon, our only sure weapon, against evil. None of us has prayed enough. Saturday's events have evoked in the whole Catholic community a renewed sense of our need for prayer. They arouse a great desire to make community reparation for the outrages committed in our midst against God's Holiness and against our own Christian witness as a community. We wish to atone for the betrayal of our faith by some in our midst. These events evoke a strong sense of the need for us to repent as a community for ways in which any of us may have failed to resist evil or may in any way have, interiorly or exteriorly, mentally or emotionally or verbally, sided in any degree with the evil of violence in past years. We feel a deep call to conversion to Christ.

I ask all Catholics to make these last weeks of Lent, and particularly Holy Week, a time of intense prayer, accompanied by fasting and self-denial. Let there be daily family prayer in all homes. Let neighbours pray in groups in one another's homes. Let prayer groups intensify their intercession. Parishes might be able to organise in their churches periods of adoration, even vigils of prayer, with groups and parish organisations sharing times of prayer between them. Our churches should be crowded on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. Our confessionals should be thronged. Let us redeem the wickedness of the times by prayer and repentance (cfr. Ephesians 5 : 16). Let us not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good. (cfr. Romans 12 : 21).

Let us invoke the aid of the prayers of Mary, Mother of the Lord. As the disciples did in the Upper Room before Pentecost, let us be persevering in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, imploring the Lord to send His Spirit of love and peace to renew the face of our community and of our city and our whole society.

2. Palm Sunday event

Palm Sunday is appointed by the Pope as World Day of Youth. A Palm Sunday procession will take place in Belfast, Ballymena and Downpatrick at 2.30 p.m. on next Sunday. In Belfast, the procession will leave St. Paul's church, led by the Cross from last Lent's Passion Play and carrying palms; it will end with the reading of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ and Mass in St. Peter's Cathedral.

This procession is not reserved exclusively for young people, although it is hoped that they will attend in very large numbers. I hope that great numbers of adults will also take part, and thus help to make Palm Sunday, particularly in West Belfast, a day of earnest intercession to God to deliver us from the evil which is within our community.

3. Sharing with the disadvantaged

Catholics living in more privileged circumstances should make themselves more aware of the conditions in which their fellow-Catholics in more deprived areas live. For them, violence, with all its fearful consequences, is a daily and a nightly affliction. Unemployment fills many, and especially the young, with a sense of hopelessness and failure and resentment. After twenty years of suffering, many see no hope of a better future. Those to whom divine providence has been generous must try to find ways of sharing resources, whether of money or of time or of expertise and skill, with those who have never had a chance.

4. Ecumenical contact

Polarisation and division between the Catholic and the Protestant communities, between unionists and nationalists, have become distressingly acute. Each community is tempted to withdraw behind its own barricades, with little opportunity, and sometimes with little desire, to try to understand how the other community feels. Catholics must make new efforts to reach



out across the walls of separation and to seek opportunities of talking and praying with Protestants and standing alongside them for Christ, for he is Lord of their community as he is of ours, and there is no other name under heaven whereby any of us can be saved except his. (cfr Acts 4 : 12)

### APPEAL TO POLITICIANS

Finally, I join my voice with that of so many leaders from other Churches in appealing to politicians of all parties to begin talking with one another to try to find ways of living in peace. How can politicians expect the people who elect them to live together in peace if they themselves refuse to talk to one another about peace? Whatever the long-term political aspirations of this group or that, whatever future political arrangements be ultimately agreed, Protestants and Catholics, unionists and nationalists, will always have to live together and share this land together. Either we live together in peace, or we destroy one another and ourselves in conflict.

A peaceful coexistence between unionists and nationalists is a precondition for any unionist future, just as much as it is for any nationalist future. Let unionist and nationalist politicians begin to talk together now about ways to peaceful coexistence. Let people in both communities keep insisting that their political representatives begin to talk and begin the talking now.

### POLITICIANS IN BRITAIN

Politicians in Britain have their responsibilities too. After atrocities like those of last week, the Westminster Parliament takes a sudden and fevered interest in Irish affairs. With honourable exceptions, their interest is too often confined to the latest atrocity. There is little continuing concern about Ireland's problems and too little recognition of Britain's responsibility in respect of these problems. In Britain, there is little understanding in depth of Irish affairs and, as a series of disastrously ill-judged decisions since last Christmas has shown, little awareness of Irish sensitivities and rights. It is an urgent need that Anglo-Irish relations be placed once again on a firm basis of reciprocity and mutual trust. It is an urgent necessity that the government tackle the social, economic, industrial and environmental neglect which West and North Belfast have for so long suffered, and should put in place a systematic and integrated programme of overall rehabilitation, making available all the expertise and resources which a critical situation demands. We must show that there is a peaceful and constitutional way to justice, and that it works.