For God, Ulster or Ireland?

Religion, Identity and Security in Northern Ireland

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Executive Summary

In the Lower Shankill area of Belfast there are two murals painted on gable walls which depict very differing images highlighting the complexity of the relationship between religion and politics in Northern Ireland. One of the murals depicts a hooded UDA gunman pointing a rifle at the onlooker, which ominously if one moves around the estate, seems to follow you. Loyalty to the UK, but more specifically ‘Ulster’, is not in question. On another gable wall just across the grassy field is a depiction of Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to the wall at Wittenburg with the inscription ‘Hier stehe ich. Ich kann nich anders. Gott helfe mir’. The message is clear – that Protestants in the present day must preserve the faith of their forbearers. Not far away in the predominantly Catholic and nationalist Ardoyne area is a mural depicting the Virgin Mary while in a neighbouring street stands a memorial for local republicans who made the ultimate sacrifice and died for Ireland during the Troubles.

The history of Ireland is such that the significance of religion in the dynamics of difference can trace its roots rather literally back to the Plantation of Protestant Scots and English settlers into predominantly Catholic Ireland from the seventeenth century onwards. Scholars have debated throughout the years to what extent the subsequent dynamics of conflict in Ireland were religious, based on national allegiance, the legacy of colonialism or a combination of complex and overlapping factors. Banners annually displayed at the Twelfth of July or ‘Our Lady’s Day’ display images reaffirming loyalty to Protestantism and the Crown, or Catholicism and ‘Mother Ireland’ which tend to be based on a rather simplistic narrative of parallel histories which only tend to intersect where violence is involved. This representation tends to ignore the complexities of history, when radical Presbyterians were inspired by the French Revolution to become United Irishmen or when more Catholic Irishmen and women fought as part of the British Army throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as did against it for Irish independence.

Nevertheless, it remains the case in Northern Ireland that Protestantism tends to be equated with Britishness and Catholicism with Irishness which is evidenced regularly when Protestants tend to vote DUP and Catholics for Sinn Féin. In the so-called era of ‘secularisation’ why have such tendencies changed little? Are these trends inevitable? Where does one begin to untangle the complex and multi-faceted relationship between religion and nationality, to tease out what the relevance of religion is in terms of perpetuating the community divide? Are there any lessons that can be learnt from Northern Ireland for other contexts in which religion has been implicated as a cause of conflict? While an extremely difficult and, arguably, an impossible task, these were some of the aims of this specific research project.

In April 2010 the Institute for Conflict Research was commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council, under the Global Uncertainties programme, to research the dynamics of religion, identity and perceptions of security in Northern Ireland. The research aimed to assess the dynamics and
role of religion on perceptions of identity, views of the ‘Other’ community and the impact if any on attitudes to security in both a Northern Irish and broader international context. The research is based upon 52 in-depth interviews with members of the lay population in Belfast, County Armagh and various locations West of the Bann as well as discussions with 14 individuals whom we have referred to as ‘key informants’ – most of these individuals came from within the church structures.

The key findings of the research are:

1. Religion and identity remain relatively coterminous in terms of Irish/Catholic and British/Protestant, however identities are not fixed; rather they are multiple, overlapping and can evolve over an individual’s lifetime;
2. That a more nuanced understanding of the role of religion in the context of the communal divide is required. Although religion was not the primary driver behind the conflict, at times even non-churchgoers drew upon religious ideas to differentiate between the communities in Northern Ireland;
3. Although some of those interviewees with the most ‘negative’ views of the ‘Other’ community were regular churchgoers with strong theological convictions, some of those individuals with the most conciliatory views towards the ‘Other’ community were also regular churchgoers. Those with the most negative views of the ‘Other’ community were those with little experience of the ‘Other’, whether they were churchgoers or not;
4. Interviewees were broadly critical of the mainstream churches as institutions during the Troubles and felt that they did not do enough to try and stop the violence. While some viewed this role as passive and based upon a ‘head in the sand’ approach, other interviewees discussed the active role of the churches in maintaining the communal divide in terms of their role in the education system and in displaying various political and national symbols;
5. While some Protestant interviewees perceived a close connection between Irish republicanism and the Catholic Church during the Troubles, Catholics and republicans argued that this was not the case. This reflected the tendency to view the church of the ‘Other’ as in a stronger position than ‘our’ church;
6. This perceived fragmentation within the Protestant community was believed to be reflected in the ambivalent relationship between the Protestant working-class and the more ‘middle-class’ Protestant denominations. Protestants (and Catholics) tended to view the Catholic Church as more ‘socially inclusive’. The tendency for Protestants to see division and weakness among their churches, politicians and community added to a sense of insecurity when compared to the perceived ‘monolith’ of Catholicism and republicanism;
7. Although at one level the Agreement has improved the physical security situation in terms of reducing levels of violence, some interviewees felt that it had institutionalised division at a political level and provides little room for alternative
identities to develop. This may lead to more longer-term insecurity in the zero-sum world of Northern Irish politics;

8. One person’s security can be another person’s insecurity. While the removal of watchtowers and the ‘normalisation’ process was broadly welcomed by Catholics, for some Protestants, and particularly those in rural areas, this led to a level of psychological insecurity in the context of continued dissident republican activity;

9. While the Northern Irish conflict was viewed to be political, events such as 9/11 and 7/7 associated with the ‘War on Terror’ were viewed to be religiously motivated. While dialogue was viewed as crucial in coming to a political arrangement in Northern Ireland, dialogue was viewed by many as impossible with ‘Islamic fundamentalists’ who are ‘irrationally’ motivated by religion;

10. It was felt that lessons needed to be learnt for the contemporary period in terms of security policies which were implemented in Northern Ireland which alienated a section of the population.

The following sub-sections elaborate on these findings in more detail.

Religion and Identity

Unsurprisingly, most Protestant interviewees identified as British and/or Northern Irish, while most Catholic interviewees identified as Irish. However, some individuals did not define themselves as Protestant or Catholic as they felt that these religious labels had been politicised. Some churchgoing Protestants preferred to refer to themselves therefore as ‘Christian’. Few older Catholics, even if Mass going, identified with the word Christian which tended to be associated within the Protestant theology of ‘being saved’. However, younger Catholics were more inclined to suggest that they were Christian which indicates that this trend may be changing. It may be worthwhile for the churches to explore to what extent this tendency exists amongst their own parishioners, with a view to increasing understanding between Catholics and Protestants more generally about what it means to be a Christian in 2012.

Defining ‘religion’

There was a general trend towards defining ‘being religious’ as going to church regularly, but our evidence would suggest that religious influences impact upon even those who do not attend church regularly. A number of our interviewees said they were ‘not religious’ but prayed daily at home, blessed their children every night before going to bed or made sure their children attended Sunday school. Many Catholics still felt that it was important for young people to make the Sacraments, even if they did not attend church.

Statutory and other agencies should bear this in mind when reviewing survey data which year on year tends to be used as evidence that the influence of ‘religion’ is on the wane. Individuals may either have developed a distaste for the politicisation of religious identities
in the Northern Irish context or, alternatively, decided that if they don’t go to church weekly they can’t be considered a ‘Protestant’ or a ‘Catholic’. This however does not automatically render ‘religion’ unimportant.

Religion, life-path and social function

It is also important to note that survey data captures a specific point in time – this does not reflect the changing significance of religion, and more specifically, the church, for people as their lives develop. Many of our interviewees talked about going through different phases in their life when their faith, beliefs and attendance at church ebbed and flowed. In particular many interviewees spoke of not attending church regularly in their late teens and 20s, but when they had children they decided to start attending again. Part of this return to the churches was a feeling that the Christian ethos, of good versus evil, right and wrong, were positive influences for children growing up.

‘Religion’ still appears to play a role socially for a number of Catholics and Protestants, particularly in rural areas, where going to Mass or church was as much a social function as a religious one. The high rate of attendance of Protestants at Sunday school and Boys’ and Girls’ Brigade even when their parents were no0t regular churchgoers would also appear to indicate a continuing social significance of religion in the Northern Irish context.

Religion and views of the ‘Other’

While some of the more negative attitudes towards the ‘Other’ community were from churcgoing interviewees, some of those with the most conciliatory attitudes towards the ‘Other’ were also regular churchgoers. Rather it appeared to be the case that those individuals who had little positive experiences of the ‘Other’ were more inclined to draw upon negative stereotypes. At times these assumptions moved relatively seamlessly from the religious into the political realm.

Rather importantly, at times some interviewees quite proudly felt that as Protestants they were ‘individual thinkers’ who did not bow to authority, or that they were Catholics who had a greater sense of ‘community’ than Protestants. Some interviewees argued that these characteristics have some basis in theology given that one tends to have to make a declaration of faith to ‘opt in’ to the Protestant churches, while Catholics are ‘automatically’ included in the community by birthright.

Nevertheless, the difficulty with this is that while these may seem relatively benign characteristics to assign oneself and one’s community, they also support the perception of difference which can be drawn upon in much more negative ways. Indeed, even some church leaders interviewed as part of this project drew upon these views of themselves and their religion. It may be worth considering the negative impact that these views can have in feeding into perceptions of the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’. It is likely that if people are told often enough that the theology of their church and community leans towards individualism then
this can very easily move into perceptions of Protestantism at a political level as ‘weak’. This may then be contrasted with the sense of a ‘unified’ and ‘monolithic’ Catholic community which was perceived by some Protestant interviewees as being exemplified by the ‘pan-nationalist front’ during the Troubles.

**The Catholic Church and Republicanism**

A number of Protestant interviewees drew upon their sense of a strong and unified Catholic community to suggest that the Catholic Church and republicanism worked closely together during the Troubles. This most visibly manifested itself in the role of priests in mediation efforts during the hunger-strikes and the fact that priests presided over the funerals of IRA volunteers.

However, many Catholics and republicans felt that the Catholic Church ‘abandoned’ the nationalist community during the Troubles and in particular, during the ‘hunger-strikes’ when pronouncements were made that the hunger-strikers were ‘committing suicide’. Mass going Catholics argued that such radically differing perceptions from their Protestant counterparts were a result of the differing theologies within Catholicism and the Protestant denominations. This suggests that there may be some work for the churches to do in terms of exploring these differing perceptions with regards to administering funeral rites.

**The Protestant working-class and the churches**

The tendency to see strength in the ‘Other’ community and weakness in one’s own community was further exemplified by perceptions of a schism which had developed between the mainstream Protestant denominations and the Protestant working-class. In this regard, the middle-class nature of the Protestant denominations and associated ‘snobbery’ tended to be contrasted with the more ‘socially inclusive’ Catholic Church. Although moves are underway in some congregations to open themselves and their buildings up to their local community, it may be useful for the Protestant denominations to continue to consider how they can begin to re-engage with working-class Protestants. As such the promotion of the use of church buildings or halls for community events or other activities which begin to alter the perception of the church building to being that of a community resource, rather than only for the ‘drive-in’ congregation on a Sunday, would be an important step in the right direction.

**Churches and the Troubles**

Similar to the recently published research of Brewer et al. (2011), our findings suggest that many individuals felt that the churches ‘could have done more’ during the Troubles to try and stop the violence. Praise for faith-led peace-building initiatives tended to focus on individuals or specific projects as opposed to the churches as institutions. There was an acknowledgment however that there was much behind the scenes work which the churches were involved in which may never be known about. In this regard, churches should consider
the work that they were involved in during the Troubles and look at ways and means of better publicising those efforts and initiatives which can be put in the public domain. This would provide us with a more nuanced and complete picture of the role of the churches during the conflict.

There was also some debate over whether the churches merely played a passive role as helpless victims once the violence began, or whether or not the churches played a more active role in maintaining the communal divide. Criticism of the churches from some tended to focus on the use of pulpits to make political speeches or on the tendency in some churches to minister to the needs of their own flock and at times ‘stay silent’ when violence impacted upon the ‘Other’ community.

**Education**

It is clear that debate is needed on the impact of current educational structures on maintaining communal division. While there are multiple and overlapping ‘layers’ of division in Northern Irish society at the very least it is unhelpful in challenging the permanency of the divide when children essentially attend different schools depending on community background. For a number of interviewees the churches help maintain the community divide given their influence on the education system. Opinions varied between those who felt that the churches should not have a role in the education system, to those who felt that a grounding in a ‘Christian ethos’ was beneficial for young people.

**Political symbolism**

It is clear that the display of flags and emblems at church services or commemorations further intertwines the sense that to be a Protestant is automatically to support the Union and to be a Catholic is what it means to be Irish. Given that we have entered the decade of commemorations now is perhaps an opportune time for individuals both within and without church structures to discuss the role of the churches in the context of historical commemorations and dealing with the past. Such discussions may feed into opportunities to think creatively about how we can commemorate the upcoming raft of historical anniversaries in a revised light, reassessing the role of religion and that of the churches as part of the process.

**Security in Northern Ireland**

The general consensus was that physical security at the macro-level had improved as there were fewer shootings and bombings. The main threat to physical security was perceived to be dissident republicans. For some Catholics the changes in policing, removal of watchtowers and withdrawal of the army to barracks made them feel more secure, yet these changes made some Protestants feel less secure in the contemporary period. Clearly one person’s security can be another person’s insecurity, depending on community
background. This is also a potential lesson for the contemporary context regarding legislation brought in under the pretext of a ‘War on Terror’.

The Agreement was ultimately welcomed as providing a framework in which differences could be resolved politically rather than violently. However, while the political settlement drastically reduced levels of violence it can also be argued that it contributes to perennial insecurity because it concretises difference in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’, Protestant/Catholic, Unionist/Nationalist. Although the Agreement stated that everyone born in Northern Ireland had a right to be British, Irish or both, the system at present is predicated on relatively simplistic binary opposites which further entrench perceived cultural differences and can contribute to feelings of insecurity particularly in relation to interfaces or parade related disputes. The current set up allows little room for the evolution, maturation or development of alternative political and religious identities. The dispute in relation to the building of 200 new houses at Girdwood Barracks highlights that the precarious sharing out of resources within this ‘separate but equal’ context is never far from increasing tensions between communities.

Religion, Violence and the ‘War on Terror’

Most interviewees felt that the Northern Irish conflict was a political dispute and had to be resolved through dialogue. However, many felt that events such as 7/7 and 9/11 were motivated by theology. It was felt that it was much harder to deal with events associated with the ‘War on Terror’ because it is much more difficult to negotiate with ‘irrational’ religious ‘fanatics’. However, there was some concern that various security measures such as stop and search, profiling and powers of detention which had been used in Northern Ireland may end up alienating sections of the Muslim population in the UK.

Conclusions

The Northern Ireland conflict was not explicitly about religion, nor was it merely ethno-national in character. As Claire Mitchell (2006) has argued, religion gives structure, value and meaning to the communal boundary and helps us decide how individuals from the other community will act in the political sphere. It is important that the churches do not adopt a fatalistic attitude and view declining numbers on a Sunday as a sign that people no longer listen to them – indeed religious symbolism can still appeal even to those who no longer attend church. Therefore it is important that the churches are included in the discussions moving forward about how to tackle ongoing segregation and sectarianism and their own role in these processes.

The following are a number of key points and recommendations emerging from the research:
1. Individuals and institutions should critically examine their own perceptions of the religious ‘other’ and seek to avoid unintended consequences from the implicit assumptions that may still be built into public pronouncements;

2. Physical and metaphorical spaces need to be developed to bridge and transcend the binary opposites institutionalised by The Agreement;

3. The churches still have an important role to play in discussions on how to tackle ongoing segregation and sectarianism;

4. The Protestant denominations should seek to explore new ways of (re)engaging with the Protestant working-class;

5. Lateral thinking from the Northern Ireland situation indicates that it is unhelpful if preoccupation with the perceived religious roots of international ‘terrorism’ distracts attention from political factors which may be easier, and more appropriate, to address;

6. There is still a need to learn lessons from the history of security policy in Northern Ireland with regards to detention without trial, and in particular, the alienating consequences of ‘profiling’ a whole community; and

7. The onset of the decade of anniversaries is an opportune time to (re)assess the somewhat ambivalent record of the churches during the Troubles and for exploring their still considerable potential to contribute to ongoing peace-building work.
1. Introduction

Since the events of September 11th 2001, the role of theologically derived justifications for acts of violence have been reassessed in a manner akin to what Thomas Kuhn perhaps would have referred to as a ‘paradigmatic shift’.1 While Francis Fukuyama predicted that the end of the Cold War would bring with it the ‘end of history’ and the dominance of Western liberalism, it was Samuel Huntingdon who post 9/11 came to pre-eminence on the basis of the debate around his ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis.2

The paradigmatic shift which has taken place post 9/11 is one in which the previously much neglected role of religion in conflict has now come to the fore (Herbert 2007). The dominant paradigm of conflict related discourse in the early 1990s tended to focus on the ethno-national dynamics suffusing many conflicts around the globe and the human rights frameworks required for resolving them whether they be in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo or elsewhere (Chandler 2002). Little attention was given to the role of religion within a conflict setting.

This security related shift post 9/11 has also tended to seep into the consciousness of the media as well as the general public, guided by state pronouncements on the ‘terror threat’. When an act of violence now occurs in a Western democratic state within the current global security context, the assumption is one that militant jihadis or radical Islamists are behind the attacks, until proven otherwise. This appeared to be the case with the massacre in Norway on July 22nd 2011 with some initial media reports of the attacks in Oslo and Utøya speculating that they were most likely the work of an internationalist jihadist movement, conjecture which reflected the (re)framing of security in a global context with religious dynamics in mind.3

It is within this reoriented religion and security related paradigm that the origins of the Economic and Social Research and Arts and Humanities Council’s ‘Global Uncertainties’ Programme are framed. The programme aims to address two core questions:

1. How do individuals and communities develop their ideas and beliefs about security and insecurity?
2. Why do some ideas and beliefs lead to conflict, violence, or criminal activity? What lessons can we learn that provide the basis for countering those ideas and beliefs that reinforce conflict, violence and crime?

The broader programme aims to explore the implications of the long-term decline of Protestant-Catholic conflict for understanding and addressing other contemporary

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2 Although Huntingdon had published his ideas before 9/11 in his 1993 article and subsequent book in 1996.
3 The English tabloid The Sun’s headline the following day was ‘Al-Qaeda Massacre: Norway’s 9/11’. See http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/news/content/view/full/107457 Accessed September 25th 2011.
manifestations of conflict in which religion is implicated, with a particular focus on any lessons which may be applicable for the perceived 'Clash of Civilizations' between Christianity and Islam.

Although the paradigm through which security is assessed on a global scale has been reframed in the past decade, it is more difficult to argue such a case in the Northern Irish context. The perceived religious dynamics of the Irish conflict have their roots rather literally in the Plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century of Scottish and English Protestants into predominantly Catholic Ireland, which foreshadowed the conflict between the Defenders and the Peep O’Day Boys’ and later the Ribbonmen and the Orange Order.

While it has become much more common in scholarly literature to present the more recent phases of conflict in Ireland as a political or ethno-national conflict in which religion acts as a mere marker of ethnicity or political identity, is this the only function of religion in an increasingly secular Northern Ireland?

Perhaps the return to assessing the dynamics of religion in conflict scenarios on the international stage provides us with an opportunity to reassess some of the more commonly held assumptions with regards to the dynamics of difference and conflict in Ireland. It has always been particularly difficult for even the most ardent proponents of ethno-nationalism to assert to outsiders that the Northern Irish conflict has nothing to do with religion when television viewers watched coverage of the Reverend Ian Paisley being thrown out of the European Parliament for denouncing the visit of Pope John Paul II.

This difficulty became more pronounced when Mass goers were prevented from attending church at Harryville, or when thousands of Orangemen and nationalist protestors squared off against the almost idyllic backdrop of the Church of Ireland parish in Drumcree, when thousands of annual parades depict ‘loyalty’ to the Bible and Crown and when a decade of the Rosary is uttered at the beginning of commemorations to martyred Irish republicans. To outsiders it would appear that religion in Northern Ireland has retained a significance which in the so-called era of secularisation is greater than in some other Western European countries.

Much of this means that Northern Ireland is an ideal place perhaps to start when trying to tease out the dynamics behind conflict where religious resources or ideas have been invoked on occasion as justifications for violence. Accordingly, the research aims to assess the dynamics and role of religion in relation to perceptions of identity, views of the ‘Other’ community and the impact, if any, on attitudes to security in both a Northern Irish and broader international context.
1.1 Methodology

The field research for the project was conducted between July 2010 and March 2012. The specific aims of the research were to:

- Explore the intersections of faith, politics, security, violence and identity;
- Track how individual and communal beliefs and practices have (or have not) changed over time;
- Assess the extent to which underlying attitudes have been affected by recent developments, especially since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998;
- Inform comparative analysis of the distinctiveness of the Northern Ireland situation relative to other contexts of religiously motivated conflict in the UK and elsewhere, both past and present.

This report is based upon in-depth interviews with 52 churchgoing and non-churchgoing individuals of the lay population in Belfast, County Armagh and various locations west of the River Bann including Derry/Londonderry, Omagh, Strabane and Magherafelt. The demographic make up of interviewees was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Male Protestant</th>
<th>Female Protestant</th>
<th>Male Catholic</th>
<th>Female Catholic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West of the Bann</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, 28 Protestants and 24 Catholics were interviewed as part of the study. The slightly larger number of Protestant interviewees is a result of targeting individuals across the various denominations within Protestantism to provide as representative a sample of ‘Protestant’ opinion as possible. Questions for interviewees were designed in partnership with Professor John Wolffe at the Open University as this research will feed into a broader body of work Professor Wolffe is conducting. The questions aimed to assess perceptions of individual and communal identity, views on the role of religion and more specifically the churches in Northern Ireland in conflict and peace-building, views on the current security situation, and thoughts on the significance of religion in the Northern Irish context in comparison with the ‘War on Terror’.

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4 All interviewees were over the age of 18.
5 One interviewee who has not been included in this table is a former Christian male in Belfast who has moved into a different faith.
With interviewees permission all interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim. Interviews tended to last between 50 minutes and one and a half hours. Upon completion, the transcripts of the interviews were analysed thematically to assess any patterns in findings in terms of categories such as age, gender, community background, location and religiosity.

One of the initial aims of the research was to target those adults who had grown up during the Troubles in order to assess how their perceptions may have changed. However it was agreed towards the final stages of the fieldwork that a small number of younger interviewees ranging in age from their late teens to their early 30s would be included with a view to assessing whether their views on religion and security are much different to their older counterparts. Interviewees from a variety of differing backgrounds were targeted for the study. This included individuals from the community sector, victims sector, political categories (former paramilitary and security force members) and a faith background (individuals not associated with any of these categories but who happen to be churchgoers). The aim was to include as broad a range of interviewees as practically possible.

In addition to the interviews with members of the lay population, 14 interviews were held with what we have termed ‘key informants’. While most were from within church structures or recently retired from such positions, a small number included individuals who either worked for the churches in some capacity, as well as those individuals with no connections to the church at all. The following table indicates the breakdown of key informant interviews:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Church of Ireland</td>
<td>Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Monsignor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Bishop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Pax Christi member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Church of Ireland</td>
<td>Parishioner and Head Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>ECONI representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Former Catholic</td>
<td>Outside church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of interviewing this group of key informants was to put to them some of the emerging findings and perceptions of lay interviewees to assess whether in their experience any of these perceptions were valid. The research however was primarily focused on the lay
interview material and therefore the contributions of the key informants have been kept to a minimum within this document. There will be ample opportunity for a more detailed analysis of the key informant material within Professor Wolffe’s ongoing research under the Global Uncertainties programme.

ICR staff also attended a small number of church services and parades to assess any link between religious and political symbolism. The church services attended included the commemorations for the Relief of Derry in St. Columb’s Church of Ireland parish in August 2010, as well as Mass held in St. Peter’s in Lurgan in the same month. In terms of Loyal Order parades attended, these included the Twelfth of July in 2010 and 2011, the 13th July at Scarva in 2010, and the Apprentice Boys’ parade on the last Saturday in August in 2010. In relation to nationalist commemorations, the Easter commemoration at Milltown in 2010, the Ancient Order of Hibernians ‘Our Lady’s Day’ parade and Irish National Foresters parade in August 2010 were also attended. These events provided an opportunity to view the symbolism on display and discuss with some of those in attendance the reasons why they had decided to attend the parade/commemoration.

For the purposes of this report we have described interviewees as regular churchgoers, occasional churchgoers and non-churchgoers. Non churchgoers include those who attend church only for special occasions such as weddings and funerals. While recognising that these are arbitrary and basic categorisations they merely aim to assist the reader in terms of attributing quotes to individuals by contextualising their levels of churchgoing.

1.2 Structure of the report

The report is structured into eight sections. Section two provides a review of relevant literature in relation to religion, identity and politics in Northern Ireland. Section three begins documenting the findings of the research and focuses on interviewees’ perceptions of their own identity, how it relates to religion if at all, and the role of religion in a personal and social context. Section four offers some thoughts as to the role of the churches during the conflict and seeks to assess whether in particular Protestant and Catholic interviewees evaluated the role of ‘their’ churches similarly.

Section five focuses on perceptions of the role of the churches in contemporary society, and more specifically, in the education system and political displays. Section six assesses views of the current security situation, the impact of the Agreement and perceptions of the main threats to security. Section seven builds upon this theme of security by comparing interviewees’ perceptions of the role of religion in the Northern Irish context to the broader ‘War on Terror’ and associated attacks such as 9/11 and 7/7. The final section, eight, provides a discussion and offers some concluding thoughts on some of the main themes emerging from the research.
2. For God, Ulster or Ireland?

According to the seminal and very poignant Lost Lives publication, on the headstone of the first designated victim of the ‘Troubles’, John Patrick Scullion, is the inscription ‘Murdered for his Faith’. Whether the Almighty is invoked by the UVF, who are alleged to have killed John Patrick Scullion, in their motto ‘For God and Ulster’, or when ‘Blessed are those who Hunger for Justice’ (Aretxaga 1997), it would appear that in the Irish context, God is on everyone’s side.

Indeed, both the Ulster Covenant, sometimes referred to as the ‘founding’ document of the Northern Irish state, and the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, claim God is in their corner. The Declaration of the Covenant refers to its signatories as those who are ‘humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted’ while the final paragraph of the Proclamation places the cause of the Irish Republic ‘...under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms...’. The ‘blood sacrifice’ of Patrick Pearse and the leaders of the 1916 Rising was subsequently taken up by Mayor of Cork Terence MacSwiney who died on hunger-strike in 1920. MacSwiney wrote:

...no lesser sacrifice would save us. Because of it our struggle is holy – our battle is sanctified by their blood, and our victory is assured by their martyrdom. We, taking up the work they left incomplete, confident in God, offer in turn sacrifice from ourselves. It is not we who take innocent blood, but we offer it, sustained by the example of our immortal dead and that Divine example which inspires us all – for the redemption of our country (Quoted in Liechty and Clegg 2001: 99).

O'Tuathaigh (1991; Graham 1997: 52) has argued that the ‘the decisive ethos within nationalist Ireland after 1922 was Catholic rather than Gaelic’. Such an influence would probably best be highlighted by the application of the 1908 Ne Temere decree, the

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6 Allegedly John Patrick Scullion was shot for no other reason than he was drunkenly singing Irish republican ‘rebel’ songs and was therefore identified as coming from a Catholic community background. However, anti-Catholic slogans were daubed on the house of Matilda Gould who lived on the Shankill Road, and who was in fact a Protestant. She died on the 27th June 1966, seven weeks after her house was fire-bombed by the UVF (McKittrick et al. 1999:125).
7 And the UVF have used the cover-name ‘Protestant Action Force’ to claim acts of violence over the years.
8 Although an 1867 Declaration of an Irish Republic referred to ‘complete separation of church and state’ (O'Day 1998: 312).
10 The Ne Temere decree was introduced by Pope Pius XI and stated that ‘Only those marriages are valid that are contracted before the parish-priest and at least two witnesses’ (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 91). Mixed marriages were therefore not valid for the Catholic Church unless witnessed by the parish priest. However, Liechty and Clegg argue that in practice Catholic clergy would not officiate unless both partners promised that all the children born within wedlock would be raised Catholic (2001: 92). In 1970 however the Matrimona Mixta decree removed any requirement that the Protestant partner must promise that children would be raised Catholic (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 93).
Fethard-on-Sea boycott\textsuperscript{11} as well as the ethos of Bunreacht na hÉireann\textsuperscript{12} in 1937 which highlighted the ‘special position’ of the Catholic Church in the Irish state and was based upon an explicitly Catholic framework of morality on issues such as abortion and divorce. While former Northern Ireland Prime Minister James Craig’s comment that ‘All I boast is that we are a Protestant parliament and Protestant state’\textsuperscript{13} is often referred to and the influence of the Loyal Orders on the ‘Orange State’ between 1922 and 1972 has also been well-documented (Farrell 1980; Bryan 2000), little attention has tended to be given to the role of religion south of the border in the context of the northern conflict.

The intertwining of Catholicism and Irish identity (Elliott 2009; Doyle 2010: 175) furthered by de Valera has tended to have gone unreferenced when comments are made with regards to Craig’s commonly used phrasing (Whyte 1971; Elliott 2009: 46).\textsuperscript{14} Brian Graham noted the comments of nationalist MP Stephen Gwynn that ‘if Ireland as a nation means what de Valera means by it, then Ulster is not part of the nation’ (Graham 1997: 38).

Clearly religion infused both Irish states post-partition. However, while the terms ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ are those used most frequently to refer to the communal divide in Northern Ireland, a qualification is often made that these terms refer to those of ‘Catholic’ or ‘Protestant’ community background, and are therefore not explicitly referring to religious communities.\textsuperscript{15} The extent to which the Irish conflict was religious has been argued extensively amongst academics over the years, and it is to documenting some of this debate that we now turn.\textsuperscript{16}

\subsection*{2.1 A ‘Religious’ war?}

While as far back as the 1960s Richard Rose contended that the conflict was for Protestants specifically a ‘bulwark of religious faith against Catholics within the six counties’ (McGarry and O’Leary 1995: 178), and Fulton has attributed elements of paramilitary related violence to the Catholic doctrine of a ‘Just War’\textsuperscript{17} and Protestant Covenantal theology (Fulton 1991; McGarry and O’Leary 1995: 177), perhaps the best known work suggesting that the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} In 1957, Catholics, prompted by their local priest, boycotted the entire Protestant community in the small County Wexford village, who were thought to have supported the action of a Protestant mother in a mixed marriage when she changed her mind about bringing children up Catholic. The Catholic Church apologised for the incident 20 years later (Elliott 2009: 231).
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Which then Teachta Dála (Member of Irish parliament) Frank MacDermot argued would alienate Ulster Protestants and postpone Irish reunification (Elliott 2009: 46).
  \item \textsuperscript{13} The statement was made in the Northern Ireland parliament on 24th April 1934. The comment has entered popular consciousness to such an extent it is often misquoted (without reference) as a ‘Protestant parliament for a Protestant people’.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Basil Brooke also spoke of his belief in employing ‘good Protestant lads and lassies’ (Bruce 1992: 20).
  \item \textsuperscript{15} To this extent Fair Employment requirements ask individuals from which community background they come from, not their expressed religious convictions.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} See Barnes’ article, ‘Was the Northern Ireland Conflict Religious?’ which appeared in the January 2005 edition of the \textit{Journal of Contemporary Religion}.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Although the Catholic Church hierarchy stated that the criteria did not meet ‘Just War’ requirements (Gallagher and Worrall 1982) and Cardinal Cahal Daly contended that ‘every single condition for the just war...is violated in the Irish situation’ (Mitchell 2006: 43).
\end{itemize}
Northern Irish conflict was primarily a religious one is that of Scottish sociologist, Steve Bruce. In his 1986 study of the politics of Paisleyism, he argued that the religious element of the ethnic identity of the Scots settlers in Ireland in the 17th Century was central to the conflict. According to Bruce, ‘religious affiliation became a central part of ethnic identity’ with Protestantism being crucial in establishing the social identity of Protestants in relation to Irish nationalists (Bruce 1986: 268). The added fact that many of the Scots settlers were Calvinists and the Irish were Roman Catholics had even more profound consequences for the development of social conflict by establishing ‘a cleavage along religious and ethnic lines which prevented other sorts of conflict, such as those of economic interest, developing’ (Bruce 1986: 121).

While estimates place the proportion of ‘evangelicals’ in the Protestant population at 25-33% (Mitchell and Tilley 2004), Bruce was particularly concerned with the role of evangelicalism in the construction of Ulster Unionist identity, believing that unionists’ main opposition to a United Ireland was always about avoiding becoming a subordinate minority in a predominantly Catholic state (Bruce 1986: 264). Bruce further suggests that there is a strong connection between the rurality of many parts of Northern Ireland and conservative religious outlooks, particularly with regards to evangelicalism (Bruce 1986: 245).

Gladys Ganiel however notes that while evangelicalism has tended to play a ‘priestly’ role for Ulster Protestants, underwriting the assumptions of Unionism and maintaining its privileged position (Ganiel 2008: 45), some evangelicals with a distaste for the Paisleyite mixing of religion and politics and the out-workings of Covenantal Calvinism formed the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI) in 1985. Drawing upon the Anabaptist tradition that church and state should be totally separate, members of ECONI claimed that some evangelicals have placed their allegiance to ‘Ulster’ before Christ. Hence Ganiel argues that Anti-Calvinist, but still evangelical theology, may possibly contribute to peace-building (Ganiel 2008: 50).

Returning however to Bruce, he contends that even ‘secular’ Protestants are ‘not far removed from an evangelical religious commitment’ as even those individuals who are not of faith often have parents who may be Bible-believing Christians, or as young people they

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18 Compared to just 1% in the Republic of Ireland (Ganiel et al. 2010).
19 Evangelicalism came to Ireland in the 1740s with John Wesley and John Cennick among other preachers (Doyle 2010: 19). The word comes from the Greek word euangelion utilised by Martin Luther (Murphy 2010: 90) which translates as ‘The Good News’, or ‘Gospel’.
20 He particularly focuses on what he perceives to be a strong connection between rurality and Free Presbyterianism (Bruce 1986: 242). However, it should be noted that as of 2001 Free Presbyterians numbered no more than 15,000 across all of Northern Ireland (NISRA 2001).
21 The ‘priestly’ role of religion is when politics, church and the state are mutually supportive. A ‘prophetic’ role of religion may mean that the churches are opposed to or relatively independent of socio-political power (Ganiel 2008).
22 Which she argues lost its privileged relationship with social and political power in 1972 when Direct Rule was restored.
will have attended Sunday schools and they are cogniscent of religious ideology (Bruce 1986: 263). As such, evangelical symbolism and assumptions can still appeal to some non-church going Protestants which informs ‘Protestant ideology’ and the core of Protestant ethnic identity (Wright 1973; Bruce 1986; Ganiel 2008: 49). Paradoxically:

...even if individuals do not personally believe, their identity tends to depend on religious symbols, leading – ironically – to the position that, while commitment to religion is weaker among Protestants compared to Catholics, the ideological position of the former is ultimately much less readily secularised (Wallis et al. 1986: 7).

A number of social scientists have however criticised Bruce for being reductionist in his framing of the Northern Irish conflict in explicitly religious terms. While not by any means the most critical of Bruce, Alan Finlayson has suggested that the significance of religion in the Northern Irish context is in the way in which religion functions within a wider political discourse. In other words, the national and the religious ‘combine’ to attain a much greater significance than they would achieve individually (Finlayson 1997).

Duncan Morrow, arguing that the relationship of Protestantism to Unionist politics was ‘undeniable’ (and best signified by the existence of the Orange Order), was however critical of what he termed Bruce’s ‘simple relationship where the religious component can be separated as immovably causal and the rest as effect. The conflict does not exist because Protestants are Protestants but Protestants are thrown back to fundamentalist myth because the conflict exists’ (Morrow 1997: 69-70). While Morrow is primarily writing about the influence of Protestantism in this instance, he also notes:

The myth that Irish Nationalism and Catholicism are unlinked was exploded by the hunger strikes of 1981. The parallel of Bobby Sands and the suffering but ultimately victorious Christ were shown to sustain not only Protestants in Ireland (Morrow 1997: 71).

According to Morrow, the influence of Protestant doctrine is not that it leads people to believe its convictions but rather lies in its firmness of conviction, ‘its ferocious attachment to the division into sinned against and sinning’ (Morrow 1997: 58). Morrow draws upon the work of French philosophers Paul Ricoeur and René Girard and argues that fundamentalist Protestantism enables people to read back the events of Northern Ireland into a ‘mythical reading’ of the Bible and identifies Protestants with Jesus on the cross, as the ‘persecuted

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23 Rosemary Sales also argued that ‘the rhetoric of religious identity is not distant’ for those individuals who do not go to church regularly (Sales 1997: 144).

24 It should be noted that to talk about ‘Protestantism’ glosses over the denominational distinctions as well as differences between theological conservatives and liberals. There are more than 80 smaller denominations of Protestantism which number less than 0.5% of the population. Some of these denominations have fewer than 100 members (Mitchell 2006).
innocent’. This in turn provides assurances that the Protestants of Ulster are part of a greater struggle of universal Good against Evil (Morrow 1997: 60).

Morrow suggests that we can understand the appeal of radical evangelicalism even to the un-churched once we understand the power which such Protestant myths have in ideological terms. In wider politics, fundamentalist Protestantism appears to legitimise a mythology of ‘heroic struggle’ which can easily be abused:

_The boundary between clear legitimation of virulent anti-Catholic rhetoric and actions designed to physically attack Catholics is paper-thin in a heightened and fearful crowd, especially for those for whom Protestant ideology is not mitigated by church-going_ (Morrow 1997: 64).

The focus on the impact of fundamentalist Protestantism in shaping Protestant identity and attitudes to Catholics, even for those Protestants who are not of theological conviction, is relatively prevalent throughout many of the works in which religion is discussed in the context of the Northern Irish conflict. This can be compared to the paucity of work looking at the influence of Catholicism on various manifestations of Irish nationalism. While Conor Cruise O’Brien talked about the ‘pseudo-secular cover’ which he felt masked ‘Irish Catholic holy nationalism’ (O’Brien 1988), the majority of scholars writing about religion and identity assert that while Protestantism is central to unionism, Irish nationalism by comparison is a largely secular phenomenon (McGarry and O’Leary 1995: 178). Indeed, reading through the literature it would appear that for many commentators, religion is more important for Protestants than it is for Catholics (Akenson 1992; Pollack 1993).

However, Claire Mitchell (2003) contends that Catholicism has been just as important politically as Protestantism, but in different ways. While Catholic doctrine or theology has not influenced social action to any great extent:

25 Morrow also draws a parallel here with the Dutch Calvinist settler theology which predominated among Afrikaaner discourse in South Africa. It is also noted that changes in the Dutch-Reformed Church were very important in the shift towards a ‘new’ South Africa after 1990. Although he does also suggest that parallels between Ulster Protestants and Afrikaaners tend to be overused (Morrow 1997: 60-61).

26 Although historian Marianne Elliott has analysed the link between Catholicism and Irishness in her 2009 publication _When God took sides: Religion and Identity in Ireland_. Similarly, in 1995 Lawrence J. Taylor conducted an anthropological study of Catholicism in south-west Donegal which assessed the social construction of religion.

27 Conor Cruise O’Brien (1998) talks about ‘holy nationalism’, its deification of the people which is traced back to the unified vision of biblical territorialism, of ethnic community and promised land conjoined with religion recorded in the Old Testament linked to the Reformation’s return to Old Testament Hebrews (Smith 2001: 98-99).

28 Orla Muldoon et al’s study based upon the 2007 Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey data did find that _overall Protestant respondents rated their religion as more important to their sense of themselves than Catholics did_ (Muldoon et al. 2008).

29 Although she does assert that theology and religious ideology are more important for Protestants generally than for Catholics (Mitchell 2006).
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...Catholicism has been politically important in terms of religious institutions and political power, religious practice and community-building and also in terms of religious ideas and ethnic identifications... (Mitchell 2003: 5).

For Mitchell, there are three main reasons that Catholicism appears to lack social and political significance. The first of these relates to the strength of opposition between communities which has papered over variations within them. Rose (1971) argued that religiosity did not make a difference to Catholics’ politics as most shared similar political grievances, but Mitchell argues that high rates of overall religiosity mask the specific role of religion, although this may be declining in more recent years with fewer numbers in attendance on Sunday. Secondly, Mitchell cites Whyte (1990) in relation to the over recording of ‘moderate’ views in surveys in Northern Ireland, upon which the lack of significance of religion for Catholics are often based - Catholics are often more likely to be in favour of ecumenism and cross-community mixing, which on the surface indicate that religion is less important for Catholics socially and politically than it is for Protestants.

Thirdly, Mitchell queries what is meant when we talk about religion? Often survey data seeks to measure the substantive dimensions of religion, and in particular, levels of church attendance, numbers of mixed marriages, personal beliefs and so on. According to Mitchell, any analysis of Catholicism must take into regard blurring between religious substance and function:

In fact the substantive dimensions of religion (beliefs, feelings, practices) often overlap with functional dimensions (acting as social cement or social control). They can reinforce each other in a complex two-way relationship (Mitchell 2003: 5).

Drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu’s formulation of habitus Mitchell outlines three primary ways that Catholicism plays a political role in Northern Ireland; firstly through institutional involvement, secondly through religious practice and thirdly in the construction of community. Mitchell asserts that for many, Catholicism has helped legitimise difference by providing an alternative idiom of identity in the predominantly Protestant Northern Ireland state. Accordingly, religiously informed concepts have infused political analyses. In particular, Mitchell discusses the impact of the hunger-strikes in 1981 and argues that eschatologically, Irish Catholicism, with a familiar discourse of victim-hood has often encouraged passivity when faced with suffering and in extreme circumstances hope for

30 As Mitchell argues, if only 9% of Catholics do not go to Mass it is unlikely that church going will mark out any specific attitudes (Mitchell 2003: 4).

31 For example in relation to NILT statistics from 2010 while 20% of Protestants said they would ‘mind a lot’ if a relative married someone from a different religion, just 12% of Catholics indicated likewise. However in relation to the mixing of children in schools it would appear that Protestants are more in favour than Catholics – when asked if they would prefer their children to go to school with children from only their own religion, 35% of Catholics agreed compared to 21% of Protestants (ARK 2010).

32 See also, Harris (1993) and Morrow et al. (1991).

33 Theological exegesis concerned with end times.
redemption through sacrifice or martyrdom, phenomena that have impacted upon political as well as religious attitudes (Mitchell 2003: 14-15).

2.2 Anti-Catholicism and Anti-Protestantism

There has been much focus on the nature of anti-Catholicism in Ireland and in comparison there tends to be little documentation of the phenomenon of anti-Protestantism which is ‘more subtle than anti-Catholicism’ (Mitchell 2006: 109). This explains the lack of information in this section in relation to anti-Protestantism which tends to be framed rather as ‘anti-Britishness’. However, anti-Protestantism and anti-ecumenism do exist among some Catholics, and Murphy notes that preconciliar Catholics often hold similar views to those Free Presbyterians and other fundamentalist Protestants who are ‘nostalgic for a time before their church was open to ecumenism and liturgical reform’ (Murphy 2010: 96). Elliott also commented on the subject:

Catholic sectarianism is no less real for being less easy to identify, and the belief that they have been history’s victims puts Catholics in denial. It often takes the form of post-colonial speak: Protestant-planter-settler-colonial victimizer versus Catholic-native-Irish-Gaelic victim (Elliott 2009: 14).

That said, the focus on anti-Catholicism is perhaps not surprising given the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England or the Westminster Confession of Faith. A number of the statements made historically by fundamentalist Protestant ‘clerical-politicians’ (Mitchell 2006: 49) from the days of Reverend Henry Cooke and ‘Roaring’ Hugh Hanna through to pronouncements made by the Reverend Ian Paisley have been based upon the anti-Christ thesis. One such example involving Ian Paisley occurred after Terence O’Neill invited then Taoiseach Sean Lemass to Stormont and sent a telegram to Cardinal Conway on the death of

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34 Historically, the Pastorini Prophecies were anti-Protestant.
35 Mitchell (2003) argues that anti-Protestantism is based partially on religious idea; that Sola Scriptura (Bible Alone), private judgement and faith are illogical and prone to the ‘pride of private intellect’ (Herbermann et al 1911: 497). This is contrasted with Catholicism and the faith in the combined wisdom of interpretation.
36 For Presbyterians. Available for viewing online at: http://www.gracefallbrook.org/westminster_standards/The_Westminster_Confession_of_Faith.pdf Accessed May 10th 2012. The Confession states ‘There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God’ (Referenced in Elliott 2009: 61).
37 Reverend Henry Cooke stated in response to the state making even limited reforms: That state support for a Protestant church, even if it was the wrong Protestant church, was better than a free market system in which Roman Catholicism would come to be dominant by virtue of numbers (Reverend Henry Cooke quoted in, Ganiel 2008: 45; Bruce 1986: 5; Thomson 2002).
38 Although this anti-Christ message has softened since the late 1980s (Elliott 2009: 61).
Pope John XXIII in June 1963. In response Paisley led a march to city hall to denounce ‘the lying eulogies now being paid to the Roman antichrist’ (Bruce 1992: 21).

In relation to anti-Catholicism, John Brewer and Gareth Higgins (1998) recorded three different types which they refer to as covenantal, secular and pharisaic modes. The covenantal mode, which is the most easily identifiable as anti-Catholic, identifies ‘Ulster’ as the promised-land and is linked to Old Testament notions of ‘God’s Chosen People’ or the ‘Elect’. One very public example of this was Ian Paisley’s ‘Never, Never, Never’ speech at Belfast City Hall opposing the Anglo-Irish Agreement at which he referred to the inevitability of victory for ‘God’s People’ (Referenced in Bruce 1986: 269-270).

Gladys Ganiel has argued that for some covenantal Calvinists in evangelical Ulster, some religions are ‘simply wrong’, and Protestants who had the ‘right religion’ must maintain their socio-political power in order to ensure God’s blessing. Therefore covenantal theology can provide a powerful theological justification for resistance or violence (Ganiel 2008: 45). Indeed, a pamphlet circulated by the small loyalist paramilitary group TARA in 1971 three days after the introduction of Internment indicates the potential influence of this covenantal theology in the context of the conflict:

Being convinced that the enemies of our Faith and Freedom are determined to destroy the State of Northern Ireland and thereby enslave the people of God, we call on all members of our Loyalist institutions and other responsible citizens, to organise themselves immediately into Platoons of twenty under command of someone capable of acting as Sergeant. Every effort must be made to arm these Platoons with whatever weapons are available. A chain of command already exists (Garland 1997: 12).

Another variant upon this ‘Chosen People’ theme is the British-Israeli doctrine, which according to Liam Murphy is the dominant ideology amongst the Pentecostal Church of God

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39 Additionally, in 1984, Paisley opposed British membership of the EEC as it was then as he believed that it would lead to a decline in Christian morality as well as a loss of sovereignty for the UK (Bruce 1986: 226). Paisley was also thrown out of the EEC parliament in October 1988 after heckling the visiting Pope John Paul II. The ‘Mother of Harlots’ insult sometimes directed towards the Catholic Church is based upon text from the book of Revelation (Ch: 23, Verse 5) (Elliott 2009: 61).

40 Covenantal and Secular are the two main types of anti-Catholicism and used to draw ethnic and moral boundaries to exclude Catholics politically, economically and socially (Brewer and Higgins 1998).


42 Calvin believed that only a relatively small number of ‘elected’ souls would be saved and each person’s fate had already been sealed in the mind of God - this is referred to as predestinationism. In contrast, Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius argued in the late sixteenth century that the concept of predestination denied human beings the agency of free will upon which Christianity is predicated (Murphy 2010: 91).

43 Later to become defunct, TARA was set up by William McGrath who was to become embroiled in the Kincora Boys’ Home sex abuse scandal, for which he was convicted in 1981 (Wood 2006: 209). McGrath often framed the conflict in explicitly religious terms. In the early 1970s the group were loosely affiliated with the UVF.

44 The swearing in oath of the UDA required putting one’s left hand on the Bible and included the statement ‘that I am a Protestant and a true subject of Her Majesty the Queen...’(Bruce 1992: 49).
in Belfast. This doctrine asserts that the white commonwealth, including Northern Ireland Protestants, are descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel. Buckley and Kenney note that this narrative focuses on the prophet Jeremiah and several individuals of Royal lineage who allegedly travelled to County Antrim before the Kingdom of Judah was placed in exile. Their intermarriage with Irish royalty subsequently led to an unbroken lineage between King David and Queen Elizabeth II (Murphy 2010: 167; Buckley and Kenney 1995: 192).

Secular anti-Catholicism emphasises the mission of the ‘Protestant people’ to oppose Roman Catholicism and according to Brewer and Higgins is most likely to be found amongst conservative and fundamentalist Protestants. In this mode, Irish Republicanism is sometimes perceived as ‘Catholicism at war’. As such, politics and theology are inter-linked with Scripture and used to support Union with Britain. They contend that while this mode may not appear anti-Catholic as its ideological premises are primarily political, it is based upon negative stereotypes of Catholics and often cites the alleged disproportionate influence of the Catholic Church in all aspects of the Irish Republic’s politics and culture (Brewer and Higgins 1998).

At times loyalist paramilitaries, while espousing political aims and non-religious goals, have drawn upon variations of this mode of anti-Catholicism. In 1972 the UDA publication at the time, the Ulster Militant, accused cross-community schemes of being a vehicle through which Catholics could ‘brainwash’ Protestants. The document accuses Catholics of being ‘liars’ and ‘hypocrites’ (Ulster Militant no. 16, 1972, cited in Wood 2006: 14). Two years later, UDA member Bob Pagels, appealed to UDA men that the UWC strike must succeed and that they should ‘think of the fate of Ulster and the threat of Rome Rule’ (Wood 2006: 38). Alan Finlayson has also highlighted the religiosity of the discourse in the New Ulster Defender, the now defunct last incarnation of a UDA political publication. He refers to an issue from December 1993 which contained the phrase ‘deliver us into’ and sense of ‘apocalypse’. The same issue, indeed the last issue of the magazine ever produced, also referred to the Republic of Ireland as a ‘sectarian’ and ‘clerical Irish state’ (Wood 2006: 174).

The final mode of anti-Catholicism, the pharisaic mode, is based upon popular imaginings of the Biblical Pharisees and Reformed doctrine, but the language is conciliatory, open, paternalistic and devoid of political rhetoric. Dialogue and relationships with Catholics are

45 And those in the USA as well.
46 The senior UDA figure John McMichael wrote in ‘Common Sense: Northern Ireland an Agreed Process’ which the UDA released in 1987 that ‘Ulster ‘Protestants’ do not fear nor mistrust Ulster ‘Catholics’ because they are Catholics but because they believe them to be Irish Nationalists — fifth columnists — uncommitted citizens... (UPRG 1987: 2).
encouraged because Catholics are ‘misguided’ as they follow the ‘incorrect doctrine’ (Brewer and Higgins 1998: 153).47

It should be noted that while Brewer and Higgins document these forms of anti-Catholicism, like many other scholars, they argue that the primary function of religion in the context of Northern Ireland is that it acts as a ‘label’ for two differing ethnic groups.48

2.3 Ethno-nationalism

Many eminent scholars on Northern Ireland have tended to classify the conflict as primarily ethno-national in character (Clayton 1998; Coulter 1998; McGarry and O’Leary 1995; Sales 1997). Proponents of ethno-nationalism have tended to argue that religion acts as a ‘marker’ of ethno-national communities rather than the other way round; that is religion signifies communal difference but is not a constituent part of that difference.

The consociationalists Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry are amongst the most well-known proponents of the Northern Irish conflict being primarily ethno-national in nature and are perhaps the most dismissive of scholars on the role of religion in shaping the dynamics of conflict in Northern Ireland (McGarry and O’Leary 1990; 1993; 1995).

Arguing contrary to Steve Bruce, McGarry and O’Leary maintain that unionism’s fundamental attribute is as ‘the political expression of an ethno-national community which is religiously demarcated and not the political expression of a religious community’ (McGarry and O’Leary 1995: 200). Similarly to Fulton (1991), McGarry and O’Leary assert that the main role of religion in the context of the conflict was in reinforcing social division through attitudes to endogamy and segregated education. They argue that there are limitations to religious explanations to the conflict as violence escalated while all the time church attendance declined. As such, they contend that secularization in Northern Ireland has not affected the continuing high levels of support for nationalist and unionist political parties (McGarry and O’Leary 1995: 203-204).

Indeed they believe that there is no noticeable correlation between the locations most impacted upon by the conflict and the intensity of religious convictions, noting that the Shankill was a loyalist paramilitary heartland which had rates of low-church attendance and what they term a lack of a ‘religious consciousness’. They contrast this with other parts of Northern Ireland which they believe are more ‘religious’ yet were less impacted upon by violence during the Troubles:

47 One could recall the words of Reverend Hugh Hanna in this regard in his first annual report for Berry Street Presbyterian Church in the 1850s when he stated, ‘We love our Roman Catholic countrymen, but we abhor their errors’ (Quoted in Doyle 2010: 34).
48 Anthony Buckley however differs somewhat from Brewer and Higgins and sees little difference between the covenanting and pharisaic modes of anti-Catholicism (Buckley 2010).
Rural areas around Ballymena, heartlands of support for Paisley, are tranquil and generally free of political violence...Nationalist towns like Crossmaglen may be devoutly religious but it is more difficult to make this argument about West Belfast, where there has been noticeable decline in church attendance in both blocs (McGarry and O’Leary 1995: 190).

They further argue that the fact that republican paramilitaries generally avoided targeting Protestant religious personnel and institutions, while loyalist paramilitaries generally shunned overtly religious targets indicates that the paramilitaries were not motivated or influenced by theology (McGarry and O’Leary 1995: 192 and 194).

2.4 ‘Cultural Religion’

While McGarry and O’Leary were critical of what they felt was Bruce’s ‘reductionism’ in overemphasising the role of religion in the conflict, Gladys Ganiel (2008) and Claire Mitchell (2006) are critical of McGarry and O’Leary for underplaying the role of religion. Ganiel argues that there is a need to engage and not dismiss the religious dimensions of conflict, and she suggests that Ruane and Todd’s (1996) multidimensional theory of the conflict allows for an understanding of the place of religion as one of many interlinked factors in the dynamics of conflict.

Claire Mitchell’s work questions how religion may help construct social identities and differences and challenges assumptions made by other social scientists and political theorists that societal division is essentially ethno-national. She argues that McGarry and O’Leary base their argument on a narrow conceptualization of religion which focuses solely on ‘measurable’ levels of religiosity such as church attendance, divorce rates and the number of children born outside of marriage among other ‘easily’ measurable factors.

While Mitchell argues that the conflict in Northern Ireland was not akin to a ‘holy war’, religion remained one of the central dimensions of social difference. Arguing similarly to Frank Wright (1973), she notes that religious beliefs are important but become more important in their political context. They also give meaning to this political context in what Mitchell refers to as a ‘two-way relationship’ (Mitchell 2006: 9). As such, ethnicity and

49 Only one Protestant cleric, the Reverend Roy Bradford, MP for South Belfast and an Independent Methodist Minister, was killed by the IRA in November 1981 outside his constituency office. His active involvement in the Vanguard movement and vehement opposition to the ecumenical movement however forced him to leave the Irish Methodist Ministry (Bruce 1986: 118). However, the INLA did kill three worshippers at the Mountain Lodge Pentecostal Church in Darkley in 1984 as the parishioners sang ‘Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?’ (McKittrick et al. 1999: 878).

50 Former UFF ‘C Company’ leader Jonny Adair has claimed that the UFF initially were going to target the Holy Family congregation in North Belfast in retaliation for the Shankill bomb. Adair alleges that the only reason that the attack did not take place was a heavy security presence and the fact that the chapel gates were locked (Wood 2006: 171; McKendry 2007: 126-127).

51 Although two Catholic priests were shot and killed during the Troubles, albeit by the British Army. Father Hugh Mullan was shot by soldiers on 9th August 1971 while administering last rites to a local man while Father Noel Fitzpatrick was one of eleven local people killed by the British Army in the ‘Ballymurphy massacre’ (McKittrick et al. 1999: 341 and 442).
cultural identity would have different meanings without their religious dimensions. Her work builds on the idea of ‘cultural religion’ in which religion provides symbols and rituals to support identities (Demerath 2000; 2001).

However, Mitchell pushes further in asking how these religious ideas and practices might substantially constitute rather than simply signify difference. Mitchell argues similarly to Durkheim (1915)\(^5\) that religion acts as a kind of social cement, something that binds members of a society together with a common purpose and belief system (Mitchell 2006: 69). Religion therefore creates a ‘cultural reservoir’ from which identities and actions are partially constructed and this difference is practically constructed by religion rather than just represented by it (Mitchell 2006: 5). Religion not only marks out the communal boundary in Northern Ireland but it also gives structures and practices, values and meanings to the boundary (Mitchell 2006).

In relation to the importance of religious ideas, religion often takes the form of ideology. In times of political stability these ideas of difference can be relatively benign, but ‘in crisis’, an ideology may emerge which has more substantially religious implications. Accordingly, religious concepts are used to ‘imagine’ what Protestants and Catholics ‘are like’, inform identity and mediate social and political action. In short, religious ideas can help delineate difference and provide moral evaluations of social relationships (Mitchell 2006: 19 and 96).

2.5 Religious Stereotyping

In particular, religion is highly influential at the level of stereotypes and relationships that reproduce conflict in everyday life (Mitchell 2006: 114 and 138). Mitchell highlights the religio-political dimension of Protestantism as a key concept against which Catholic identity and ‘normality’ can be defined (Mitchell 2006: 113), with a focus from Catholic interviewees in her research on stereotyping Protestants as inflexible/stubborn and more ‘devoted’ to religion.\(^5\) In contrast, Catholic self-perceptions often present themselves as more tolerant and expressive religious enthusiasm is not overly acceptable as a self-image for Catholics. The research further found that many Catholic interviewees found little difference between unionism and Protestantism and often presented Protestants as the ‘bigots’ (Mitchell 2006: 110 and 113).

There are also traits associated with being, for example, a ‘good Protestant’ the binary of which can be associated with Catholicism, and which in part at least are based upon the theology of truth/deceit, honesty/hypocrisy, clarity/hidden agendas – thus the stereotype of the ‘honest Ulsterman’ which excludes Catholics from the Protestant ‘Imagined Community’

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\(^5\) Durkheim (1915: 47) notes that religious practices, rather than religious beliefs are what matters.

\(^5\) Stereotyping in Ireland is often traced to Giraldus' two works, the *Topographia Hibernica* and *Expugnation Hibernica* which referred to the native Irish as ‘barbarous’, ‘primitive’, and ‘immoral’ (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 71). According to Liechty and Clegg these stereotypes survived and took on a confessional note with Catholicism conflated with Irishness. This barbarism/civility dichotomy influenced many aspects of Protestant thought, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 72).
and is often applied in the political sphere (Mitchell 2006: 44). Many of these stereotypes and religiously informed ideas of how people may act in the political sphere can influence even those people of little religious belief; as familiar categories of Protestant liberty with Catholic repression can help some individuals understand social relationships (Mitchell 2006: 100).

Marianne Elliott has added to this debate by suggesting that Irish identities to an extent have been fashioned by ‘religious stereotypes’ such as the historical use of the stereotype of Catholics as ‘devious’ or the stereotype of Protestants as ‘foreign’ and ‘excessively privileged’ (Elliott 2009: 13 and 93). Additionally, the concept of liberty is (in the mind of some Protestants) as a result of their religious belief and focus on *Scriptura Sola* while Catholics are restricted by the role of the priest as the mediator in their relationship with God (Elliott 2009: 68 and 72-73). Therefore in the year 2000 when David Trimble spoke of the need for Sinn Féin to be ‘house trained’ he was drawing upon a familiar stereotype of Catholics and nationalists which in part at least, according to Elliott, will have been constructed from religious and theological influences (Elliott 2009: 15).

2.6 Sectarianism as a ‘system’

While some commentators have argued that sectarianism has always had a religious element in Ireland (Elliott: 2009: 4; Liechty and Clegg 2001: 115), Joseph Liechty and Cecilia Clegg are specifically concerned with the role of religion and the churches in maintaining what they refer to as the ‘sectarian system’. The ubiquitous nature of this multi-faceted ‘sectarian system’ means that it can be maintained even by those who ‘do not have a sectarian bone in their body’ and it is the outcomes of an action or speech which judge if it is sectarian rather than the intentions (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 9).

The intersection of politics and religion is the primary feature which distinguishes sectarianism from racism and other forms of prejudice and intolerance. They are therefore critical of those theorists (including McGarry and O’Leary) who attempt to explain the conflict in Northern Ireland in terms of single factor explanations and ignore the role of religion in the context of the communal divide and ‘destructive patterns of relating’ which sectarianism encourages (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 340). Sectarianism builds and relies on a culture of blame and they argue that individuals need to take responsibility particularly in relation to what goes ‘unchallenged’. Sectarianism is therefore defined as:

...a complex of problems – including dividing, demonising and dominating – which typically arise from malignant intersections of religion and politics and which are characteristic of the kind of religiously-shaped ethno-national conflict experienced in Northern Ireland (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 37).
Within the all-encompassing sectarian system, only occasional acts of violence are required because the sectarian system (pre)disposes us to judge others by the worst actions of the worst elements of ‘their’ community (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 13-14).

They suggest that historically sectarianism has been based upon three religious doctrines which fostered sectarian attitudes and actions. The first of these doctrines is that of Providence (God is at work in the world). The second is that there is but ‘one true church’ outside of which is no salvation, while the final doctrine is the Augustinian notion that error has no right. While religious ‘truth’ claims may not be sectarian, making religious truth claims in a sectarian society is difficult (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 278), and they believe that if Irish Christians wish to save religion from disrepute, the way to do it is not to deny the relationship between sectarianism and religion, but to recognise the link and to change accordingly. They believe that some churches in Northern Ireland have allowed loyalty to their ‘nation’ to taint, distort or subvert their being and mission of church in what they refer to as an ‘idolatrous relationship with nationality’ (Liechty and Clegg 2001: 300-301).

Siobhan Garrigan (2010) also highlights the link between religion and politics, and contends that churches ‘inadvertently’ participate in the subconscious structures of sectarianism. Garrigan argues that the comfort with which churches focus on the ‘minutiae of mundane and local concerns’ allows major issues of the day to go unspoken, and in church the language of ‘our community’ reinforces a sense in which ‘our’ church is separate, and more worth praying for than that of others (Garrigan 2010: 114). This sense of ‘our’ church is predicated on an insider/outsider dynamic which feeds into sectarianism, and the ‘vetting’ of a newcomer acts as ‘reinforcement of the idea of a church as a closed club’ (Garrigan 2010: 70 and 73):

*When Priests and Ministers refer to ‘our’ community* in the context of Sunday morning worship, *it is therefore unlikely to be one community among many; rather, it is one out of two, the ‘two communities’ of religious self-understanding in Ireland being Protestant and Catholic* (Garrigan 2010: 111).

She also looks at the issue of flags being present in churches, and in half of the Protestant churches she visited there was a Union flag on display. She refers to the raising of a national flag in a church in Ireland as a ‘sectarian act’, and concludes that imaginative acts of worship such as ecumenical Bible study should be promoted as a way of ‘worshipping beyond sectarianism’ (Garrigan 2010: 197 and 211).

One group of individuals whom one could perhaps suggest are already doing this are Charismatic Christians, who place their emphasis on non-denominationalism, believing that the Church is ‘One’ which transcends earthly appearances (Murphy 2010: 47).

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54 Which she contrasts with Sweden, in which the display of the national flag is not offensive to a sizeable section of the community (Garrigan 2010: 81).
In his study of Charismatic Christianity in Belfast after the Troubles, Liam Murphy notes that the meeting of Charismatic prayer groups including both Catholic and Protestant aims to transform Irish society from a sectarian to a ‘sanctified’ society, which is performed through the cleansing enacted through prayer (Murphy 2010: 245). The goal for Charismatics is to discover a ‘true’ Christian Irish history which moves beyond the divisions of ethno-nationalism (Murphy 2010: 194).

However, Murphy contends that most Catholics view charismatic practice as additional to their Catholicism and rarely ever substitute a ‘Charismatic’ identity over and above their Catholic one (Murphy 2010: 14). While the strength of residual Catholic identity has been documented elsewhere (McAllister 2005; Hayes and Dowds 2010), Murphy is sceptical with regards to the secularization thesis as he is critical of the stark binary division often made between the religious and the secular. He suggests that the fact that the modern project of statecraft encourages individuals not to define themselves in religious terms does not render religion unimportant, and drawing on the work of Talal Asad (2003), he believes that the way beyond this religious/secular dichotomy is the creation of a space in which ‘to confront the fluidity and vagary of a paradoxically secular religiosity’ (Murphy 2010: 281).

The following sub-section seeks to draw out some more of these issues relating to the secularization thesis and assess the impact that possible secularization may have on the relationship between religion and politics in a specifically Northern Irish context.

2.7 Religion and Politics

While there has been a decline in religious observance over the years as has been the case elsewhere, Northern Ireland still ranks as one of the most religiously observant societies in Western Europe and indeed the world (Fahey et al. 2004; 2006; Mitchell 2006). In 1999, only 13% of respondents in Northern Ireland ‘never’ attended church compared to 54% in Great Britain (De Graaf and Need 2000: 124). According to the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey in 2010, this had risen to 17% of respondents who ‘never’ attend church. In contrast, 32% of respondents attended church once a week, 9% several times a week and 7% once a month (ARK 2010).

Additionally, 7% attended once or twice a month, 13% several times a year, 7% once a year, and 9% attended less frequently than once per year. The question excluded attendance at ‘special occasions’ such as weddings, funerals, baptisms etc.
upon levels of church attendance, with just 15% of 18-24 year olds attending church once a week, compared to 47% of those aged 65 and above (ARK 2010).\textsuperscript{59}

John Brewer argues that while religious observance has undoubtedly declined over the years, changes in personal religiosity are not however significantly undermining ethno-national identities, ‘for these have become self-sustaining and independent of their religious roots’ (Brewer 2004: 275). As such:

*Religion remains a central determinant of political identification: in 1998, 75% of Protestants identified as Unionists and 1% as Nationalists, 61% of Catholics as Nationalist and 1% as Unionist, showing very low political identification across religious traditions* (Brewer 2004: 279; Herbert 2007: 6).\textsuperscript{60}

More recent data suggests that these trends between at least nominal religious identification and national identity persist. Protestants are still more inclined to view themselves as unionist (65%) and British (61%) and Catholics more likely to consider themselves nationalist (54%) and Irish (58%) (ARK 2010).

However, it should be noted that these more recent statistics indicate that 10% fewer Protestants identified as unionists than had done so in 1998 while 7% fewer Catholics identified as nationalist in 2010. It would appear that some of these individuals are less inclined to define themselves in 2010 in either political or religious terms - 82% of respondents in 2010 who defined themselves as ‘neither’ unionist nor nationalist were of ‘no religion’ (ARK 2010). This appears to support the assertion that the absence of a religious affiliation is often associated with the lack of a political identity (Breen and Hayes 1997: 228; Mitchell 2006: 30).

The ‘no religion’ group which accounted for 13% of all respondents in the 2010 survey can be compared with the 0.9% of individuals who indicated they were of ‘no religion’ in Richard Rose’s Loyalty Survey (Rose 1971), and the proportion of the religiously non-affiliated has grown four-fold since the late 1970s (Hayes and Dowds 2010). Table 1 indicates these changes in personal religiosity as we question - what impact, if any, does the decline in levels of personal religiosity have in the context of the Northern Irish ‘divide’?

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\textsuperscript{59} However, it has been noted that amongst some young Protestants, attendance rates are much higher than these statistics would suggest, particularly amongst young evangelicals where attendance can be as high as 85% (Bruce and Alderdice 1993: 15; Mitchell 2006).

\textsuperscript{60} Indeed, rates of mobility between Catholics and Protestants generally are extremely limited. In 2002, less than 1% of those who were raised Catholic become Protestant and less than 2% of those who were raised Protestant became Catholic (Hayes and McAllister 2004: 6; Mitchell 2006: 23). Statistics are based on the 2002 NILT survey.
Brewer asserts that with the decline in religious observance we might expect to see serious implications in the future for political identities in Northern Ireland. He bases this upon a review of the Census data between 1926 and 1991. He highlights the falling numbers within the main Protestant denominations over and above mere demographic changes, particularly in the Belfast area. In particular he focuses upon the loss of church membership amongst the young, the diminishing assimilation of the next generation into the Protestant churches and the ageing population of the churchgoers (Brewer 2004: 266). In support of this, Brewer points to the drop of 62.6% in the Belfast synod of the Presbyterian Church which occurred between 1963 and 1999 (Brewer 2004: 268).

Catholicism would appear to permit ‘greater nominalism and has a stronger residual identity’ (Brewer 2004) with stronger levels of ‘transmission’ from Catholic parents to children of a ‘Catholic’ identity (Hayes and Dowds 2010). The retention rate for Catholics appears to be around 93%, for Presbyterians 79%, for Anglicans 74%, while for fundamentalist Protestant churches the retention rate is reported to be only 65% (Hayes and McAllister 2004: 6; Mitchell 2006: 23). Both Hayes and Dowds (2010) and McAllister (2005) argue that as Protestant denominations tend to have lower levels of transmission, a larger proportion of both those who cite ‘no religion’ and those who move to other smaller Christian denominations are more likely to come from a Protestant rather than a Catholic background.

However, while secularisation at first glance appears to be impacting upon the Protestant churches most, the greatest decline in church attendance over the years has been amongst

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**Table 1: Religious Identification, 1968 - 2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Church of Ireland</th>
<th>Presbyterian</th>
<th>Methodist</th>
<th>Other Christian</th>
<th>No Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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61 This table focuses on those from a Catholic background as well as those from the Protestant denominations and does not include those for example from Muslim, Jewish or other minority faith backgrounds.
Catholics. While 95% of Catholics attended Mass weekly in 1968 (Rose 1971), by 2004 only three-fifths (60%) of Catholics went to Mass once a week (Mitchell 2006: 23), while by 2010 this figure stood at 44% (ARK 2010). However, while this indicates that weekly Mass going is in decline amongst Catholics, they are still more inclined to attend Mass on a weekly basis than their Protestant counterparts are to attend church services. In 2010, only 24% of Protestants went to church every week, and while 10% of Catholics ‘never’ went to church, 22% of Protestants ‘never’ went to church (ARK 2010). While Protestant attendance figures have therefore not declined at as fast a rate as those for Catholics, overall they are much lower. Although Protestants and Catholics are therefore less inclined to attend church services, a significant proportion of individuals still ‘believe’ as table 2 suggests.

Table 2: Differences in belief by Religious Identification and Church Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Who Believe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Attender</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular Attender</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Attender</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Attender</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular Attender</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Attender</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The statistics indicate the complexity of what is meant when the term ‘religion’ is used. Indeed, 40% of those individuals who state that they are of ‘no religion’ still believe in God and life after death, while 17% of those who state they are Catholic and 20% of those who state they are Protestant do not even believe in God. The latter finding would perhaps indicate that the terms, in these instances, are being used to denote community background as opposed to religious belief. But even for those individuals who believe they are only nominally Protestant or Catholic, does that mean that religion plays no role in their sense of self and perceptions of those from a different background? The following section documents some of these issues with regards to perceptions towards religion and identity.
3. Religion and Identity

The following section documents interviewee’s perceptions of their own identity, the relationships between a sense of being a ‘Protestant’ or ‘Catholic’ and political outlook and also the social function of the churches in terms of contributing to a sense of communal identity.

3.1 Community background and Identity

In general, the majority of interviewees conformed to the Protestant/British (or Northern Irish) and Catholic/Irish binaries, but there were some interesting caveats to this, including a small number of individuals from a Protestant background who referred to being Irish or both Irish and British.

For those Protestant interviewees who suggested that there was an Irishness to their sense of identity as an adult, this was something that tended to have changed as they had got older; according to one interviewee ‘something that has come through my experience and of broadening my horizons’. For example, the interviewee in question commented that if he had been asked his identity when he was a teenager it would have been ‘very much, Protestant Unionist’; in contrast he now suggested that in his fifties he was British, Irish and Northern Irish as well as being from a Christian tradition. Another interviewee commented:

*I have never really felt British since I was 18, I just feel Irish. And not in a nationalist sense. I just feel I belong to the Island of Ireland. But probably the first time when I felt that would have been 1979* (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Churchgoer).

A small number of other interviewees also suggested that they perceived a greater level of fluidity in their identity at present than they would have done when they were teenagers, when they would have been more inclined to define themselves as ‘Protestant’ and ‘British’. Given that the majority of interviewees were growing up during the Troubles, the levels of violence appeared to limit the space for alternative identities to develop beyond the oppositional binaries of Protestant/British and Catholic/Irish. This was even the case for one younger interviewee in her 20s who felt that while she would have felt more explicitly British in her teens when she still lived in a small and isolated Protestant community in south Armagh, her experience living outside Northern Ireland as an adult had added a sense of Irishness, ‘which is something I would love to call my own’.

It is important to clarify however that these interviewees were the exception rather than the norm and the majority of individuals from both churchgoing and non-churchgoing Protestant perspectives often referred to being Northern Irish or British as well as ‘Protestant’.
I would say Northern Irish and British are the two main...although I am also a member of the Church of Ireland but I would largely see myself as Northern Irish (Male, 40s, Protestant, Derry/Londonderry, Non-churchgoer).

Interviewees from a Catholic background were overwhelmingly inclined to indicate they were ‘Irish’. While one interviewee from Belfast referred to having a dual Irish and British identity on account of the fact that she held a British passport, and another individual talked about there being ‘British influences’ on his sense of identity, Catholic interviewees were slightly less inclined to suggest that their identity had evolved since they were younger. Catholic and Irish was a common form of identification for even non-churchgoing Catholic interviewees. Indeed, several interviewees who suggested they were ‘non-religious’ still chose Catholic as the primary source of identification over and above Irish:

_Irish and Catholic I think it would be...I think Catholic would come first...I don’t know, it’s just my religion. I am a Catholic, although I don’t practise it like, I don’t run to church. But I am known as a Catholic. I come from a Catholic family. I live in a Catholic area, I went to Catholic school, so, Catholic_ (Female, 30s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

‘Irish Catholic’ therefore tended to be a much more common response amongst Catholic interviewees than was ‘British Protestant’ amongst Protestants. Protestant interviewees were more likely to place different emphasis in this regard on whether they felt Protestant, British, Northern Irish, Irish or a combination of all of these.

However four Catholic interviewees from close to the border felt more comfortable with being described as ‘Northern Irish’ rather than Irish. This was because they believed South Armagh was isolated from both northern and southern jurisdictions during the Troubles, and there was a sense of strong regional attachment which would indicate that locality can also influence the complex process of self-identification:

_Because I am proud to be from the Province of Ulster and I would see Northern Ireland as the Province of Ulster rather than the six counties...And I think for the South Armagh area I would always have grown up with a strong sense that this was an area that neither places wanted_ (Female, 50s, Armagh, Catholic, Non-churchgoer).

However, it is important to note in this regard that this sense of ‘Northern Irishness’ was not necessarily defined exactly the same as their Protestant counterparts while for some Protestant interviewees the meaning of being ‘Irish’ was not necessarily exactly the same as for Catholics.

### 3.2 Faith and Identity

Despite the fact that the majority of interviewees identified themselves as Protestant and British/Northern Irish or Catholic and Irish, those individuals who were of faith, particularly
from the Protestant denominations, tended to prioritise their religious identity over and above a regional or national affiliation:

*Evangelical Christianity is much more important than nationality to my mind, it’s much, much higher* (Male, 40s, Congregationalist, Omagh, Churchgoer).

Even those Protestant interviewees of faith who suggested that their religious affiliation was much more important to them than their national identity more often than not also stated that they were also British and/or Northern Irish. While it may not always be the primary means in which an individual self-identified, national identity was often accepted as one interviewee suggested as ‘part of the core matrix with which I self identify’.

It also became apparent that the residual nature of some form of attachment to being a ‘Protestant’ or a ‘Catholic’ by virtue of birth tended to remain. This was discussed by one interviewee who highlighted the residual nature of his ‘Protestant’ identity despite the fact that he had moved into another faith more than 30 years ago:

*But Protestantism, totally, it’s deeply embedded in the psyche and you know, I spent the first 20 years of my life deeply embedded in that culture and singing in the choir you know, so it is very, very deeply there* (Male, 50s, Other faith, Belfast, Churchgoer).

This residual attachment was also important for a younger interviewee in Belfast who occasionally attended Mass and defined herself as a Catholic, despite not being sure whether or not she believed in the teachings of the church:

*I am a Catholic. But I have to say I really disagree with a lot of the teachings. And the outline of the story is farcical, it’s really fictional. So I wouldn’t really identify myself with any other faith or religion. But I would have reservations with what is happening today and what they are teaching children because I feel as if it’s not really true* (Female, 30, Catholic, Belfast, Occasional churchgoer).

Several interviewees from a Protestant background hesitated to use the term ‘Protestant’ to describe their identity for two main reasons. Firstly, one non-churchgoing individual preferred to define herself in terms of her national identity as she felt the religious ‘label’ was no longer significant for her as she no longer believed in God. Secondly, three interviewees from a Protestant faith background were reluctant to refer to themselves as Protestants and preferred to use the term ‘Christian’, or rather focused on their denominational adherence. This was suggested by one interviewee to be a result of the term Protestant being too nebulous to define religious beliefs specifically. However, the other two interviewees believed that the term had ‘fallen into disrepute’ given things that had been said and done during the Troubles ‘For God and Ulster’:

*I do not see myself as a Protestant, genuinely... if you start to bring things like Union Jacks or Tricolours or anything into your Christian faith then you start to identify that with a religion.*
And I have a problem with that because I don’t believe God is a Catholic and I don’t believe God is a Protestant (Male, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Occasional churchgoer).

This interviewee believed that defining himself as ‘Protestant’, in the context of Northern Ireland, was a political statement which made him reluctant to use the term. Indeed, a small number of interviewees subscribed to the view that defining oneself as either Catholic or Protestant equated with a position on the constitutional question, and they were therefore more inclined to state that they were of ‘faith’ rather than of a particular religion:

I would be perceived to be a Catholic. I would not be the most ardent of Catholics, I don’t go to church that often. I go certain times. But I would still class myself as a fairly religious person, one of strong faith, not so much of strong religion (Male, 60s, Catholic, Omagh, Occasional churchgoer).

Despite the hesitation amongst some interviewees to use the term, ‘Protestant’ did remain an important term of self-definition for some of those interviewees who were non-churchgoing:

I’m non-religious as I don’t go to church or believe in the God thing, but Protestant. I know it’s contradictory, but you have been brought up you have always been a Protestant community wise (Female, 30s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

For a young female in Derry/Londonderry, the sense of being Protestant was important in an area in which Protestants were in the minority and felt ‘threatened’:

I am very proud to be a Protestant. And I think that in the city that we live in here that you are not allowed to be proud to be a Protestant... It impacts on daily life. It affects where you go and what you wear...you keep it quiet... (Female, 30s, Protestant, Derry Londonderry, Churchgoer).

The use of the term ‘Christian’ to describe one’s identity which was used by a number of churchgoing Protestant interviewees to define themselves, was rarely drawn upon by Catholic interviewees. However, younger Catholic interviewees were more inclined to state they were ‘Christians’ than their older Mass going counterparts, with some interviewees of the opinion that the use of the term Christian in the Northern Irish context had been used at times as another way of meaning ‘saved’ from a Protestant theological perspective. Two key informants felt that to be brought up in the Catholic Church in a sense means you are automatically included as part of the church, whereas in the Protestant traditions one must ‘opt in’ by making a declaration of faith. A former member of Pax Christi surmised this tendency as one in which ‘Catholics believe that once in your life you are born again, it just

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62 Although Garrigan (2010) and Liechty and Clegg (2001) have argued that the Protestant and Catholic traditions are not different religions, but rather different denominations or branches of Christianity.
takes all your life to say yes to God...whereas Protestants believe there is an event and you hand your life over’.

One young Catholic Mass goer talked at some length about this issue:

*There would have been a time in this country when people would have said ‘I’m a Christian’, and that meant ‘I’m born again’, or whatever. And it was kind of seen as taken by them (Protestants)... I remember doing a cross-community project with Stranmillis and for one day a year throughout our four year degree we had to go over and meet the Stranmillis students as a kind of link, a Diversity and Mutual Understanding (DMU) project...A lot of people during that on the Stranmillis side would have stood up and said ‘Oh I’m a Christian’, as in – we weren’t. It was almost like they were taking ownership of the word or whatever. But I think we are getting beyond that stage* (Male, 20s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

In contrast to those who prioritised the religious aspect of their identity, interviewees from a republican background tended to stress the ‘Irish republican’ and often ‘socialist’ aspect to their identity and did not see themselves as Catholic, which they associated with the ‘right-wing’ and viewed as anathema to their left-wing politics. This is an important distinction which shall be returned to in section four when looking at perceptions of the relationship between the republican movement and the Catholic Church.

### 3.3 Religion and ‘Life-path’

A key issue for a number of interviewees was what they referred to as a ‘defining moment’, generally within their formative teenage years when they tended to either deepen their faith or began to distance themselves from their church. While one evangelical Christian referred to having a religious conversion as a teenager, in contrast another interviewee from the Church of Ireland spoke about ‘growing into faith’ at the age of 18.

A number of non-churchgoers were also able to identify a point in time, usually during their teenage years, when they began to question the teachings of the church they had been raised in:

*...my drift away from the church was in large part because of the exclusivity that I saw inside it...I then started to question fundamental tenets of Christianity like ‘Do I really believe in the Resurrection?’, ‘Do I really believe in Heaven and Hell?’, and if I don’t then where does that leave a faith in God? And I still saw much of the value base of Christianity and for me the defining value of Christianity is this notion of Grace* (Male, 30s, Protestant, Armagh, Occasional churchgoer).

Several interviewees who still considered themselves as influenced by Christian teaching noted that it was either their distaste for organized religion or the politicising of religious identities which had led to them moving away from the church rather than Christianity per
se. One of those interviewees who had moved away from the church still tried to live his life based upon ‘foundational Christian values’:

*I would identify with the word Christian in terms of my sensibilities, my sense of ethics and those kind of foundational values, I consider that word as central to my identity. I don’t go to church and I wouldn’t be considered a practising Christian, whatever that means in different traditions. But I would have a great sense of indebtedness to the ethical values and to the worldview that the Christian faith in general would create* (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

For a number of Irish republicans, this questioning of the church also related to what they viewed as the church’s position as being anti-republican and pro-state, and in many ways they were critical of what they saw as the failure of the Catholic Church to get involved in politics during the Troubles. Like those churchgoing interviewees who spoke of deepening their faith in their late teens, three former republican prisoners spoke of beginning to question the teachings of the church in their late teens and early twenties.

However, one former IRA prisoner who was critical of religious dogma as a form of social control felt the values instilled in him as a child and as a teenager remained strong, and despite the fact that he described himself as ‘non-religious’, he felt that the teachings of the Church had impacted upon his sense of morality and of ‘right and wrong’:

*I have to say though that I got my ethos of right and wrong from the Church, it’s still there with me about how I view the world, because when they get you as a child, from the ‘cradle to the grave’, I can’t shake it. I don’t want to shake it. But it shaped me. And I am what I am today, and part of that was the Church* (Male, 50s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

This interviewee referred to going with his family to Midnight Mass at Christmas despite being very critical of the Catholic Church with the importance of this attendance at Mass being the telling of a ‘story’ which was to be shared by the whole family.

**3.4 Religion and Family**

The sense of religion being important in a familial context was one shared by other Protestant and Catholic churchgoers and non-churchgoers. This included those who referred to being more religious now than when they were younger, primarily as a result of having children and wanting their children to receive the sacraments and have some grounding in ‘their’ church:

*Well, if you are bringing up the children as Catholics I think you should go (to Mass). You know now I don’t go every Sunday but I would try to go most of the time. Also too, sometimes the children are asked in school so it’s not really fair if you’ve a child making her Communion that you don’t ever bring her to Mass, you just bring her the day of the*
Communion. My brothers and that would rear their children that way, I don’t agree with that (Female, 40s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

At times, this desire to attend church with their children was not necessarily based on theological reasons, but that the ethos of the church in terms of teaching children about ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ would be beneficial in terms of their development:

For about 15 years I didn’t (go). But I have kids now and they are going through the Sacraments and things. They go to a Maintained school...‘Let’s go back and do it for their sake’... it’s great for kids growing up. I think it gives them something to aspire to... They hold right and wrong, good and evil, being a good kid, being a bad kid, I think that’s just all really helpful as a child (Male, 30s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

Another regular Mass goer from Derry Londonderry wanted to keep the tradition of attending Mass with his family going as ‘that was sort of the way I was brought up and it didn’t do much harm that way’. Indeed, most non-churchgoing interviewees brought their children up in the church they had been raised in. One Belfast republican who felt more ‘spiritual’ as opposed to religious nevertheless had his three children christened in the Catholic Church and they had also received their first Communion and Confirmation. He believed ‘for some reason you think it’s important to you still’. However, another interviewee originally from a Presbyterian background felt that she would not bring her child up in the church as she believed that despite not now believing, the influence of her own religious upbringing in church, the Girls’ Brigade and Christian Endeavour on her opinions in the present was very difficult to ‘escape’.

Most interviewees recalled having at least one parent who would have been religious and who would have ‘made me go’, or at least have encouraged them to go to church, usually on a weekly basis. One Belfast republican who now would only be in a chapel ‘for a wedding or a funeral’, recounted that as a child he ‘wouldn’t have missed Mass’ on account of his ‘devout’ mother:

…in our house like six o’clock every night you were down on your knees doing the Rosary, come hail or shine or snow, no matter what, that was it - and the Rosary didn’t stop for anybody (Male, 40s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Another interviewee recalled the importance of Catholic ritual in her household while growing up:

Every week we would have done the Rosary at 6 o’clock in the evening during certain months of the year, mummy even got the statue of Mary in. We were in off the street every day at 6 o’clock for the Rosary in the house (Female, 30s, Catholic, Strabane, Non-churchgoer).
A number of Protestant interviewees referred to coming from non-church going families, although they were sent to Sunday school. This appeared to be a relatively common theme throughout the research for both churchgoing and non-churchgoing Protestants:

...I have few memories of my dad in church, my mum never...for my mum and dad it was very important I went to the BB (Boys’ Brigade) and church. It was very important for them that I go, even though they weren’t religious, probably because they saw within the church there was very little else of it in those days, no leisure centres, where you went was either the local bar, joined the Tartan (gangs) or joined the local youth club (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Churchgoer).

Four churchgoing Protestant interviewees were also of the opinion that there was a tendency to send children to Sunday school even if parents themselves did not attend church:

People now, there’s so many other things now you can do on a Sunday and I think that’s just the world we’re living in. And some people, I find in our church, they bring their children to Sunday school, they drop them off, they go into town, get the papers, have an hour’s peace and they come back in, lift their children and go home. They don’t go to the church (Female, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

Other Protestant interviewees referred to coming from non-church going backgrounds but being sent to Boys’ Brigade or the Girls’ Friendly Society in the Church of Ireland which have significant religious components. A similar occurrence was referred to by a number of Catholic interviewees, who like their Protestant counterparts, remembered having been ‘sent’ to Mass every week, and if their parents were not regular attenders they went with extended members of the family:

My daddy refused to go to Mass. But he made us go (Female, 40s, Catholic, Belfast, Churchgoer).

One Catholic interviewee in Belfast recalled not being required to go to Mass but her parents were keen that she receive the sacraments. They also encouraged her and her brothers and sisters to pray to the saints and say their prayers every night before going to bed. While referring to not being overly religious and not attending Mass, she still prayed nightly before going to bed (as she had done growing up) and attended Mass intermittently for weddings, funerals, anniversaries and at Christmas. She also referred to blessing the children before they went to bed ‘even if it’s in their hands I’ll sign a cross’, not eating meat on Good Friday and making sure her children received their ashes on Ash Wednesday. Another young Catholic from Belfast, who described herself as ‘non-religious’, talked about going to the Clonard Novena every year in June for nine days in a row and praying to St. Anthony, although she rarely went to Mass:
The reason why I pray to St. Anthony is that I lived in a hostel a couple of years ago, me and my two kids, and I remember my granny giving me a wee book and I remember saying the prayer every single night for a new house and I got a new house at the end of it, that’s what made me believe that someone is up there watching, you know like looking after you… and if I’m walking past a chapel I would put in a pound for St. Anthony, dip my hand in and bless myself and away I go again (Female, 20s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

There was great variation amongst interviewees between their religious conviction in the present and their upbringing, varying from those whose parents were not religious but they were now regular churchgoers, to those individuals who were now no longer churchgoing but at least one of their parents would have been deeply religious. In line with this there were diverging views as to whether or not one had to attend church regularly to be considered to be a Christian.

3.5 Christianity and Churchgoing

Interviewees were asked whether or not regular church attendance was important to being a Christian. The four interviewees most adamant that regular church going was mandatory to being a Christian were perhaps unsurprisingly churchgoing Protestants, one a Congregationalist, one Church of Ireland and the other two Presbyterian. An interviewee from Magherafelt felt that while ‘in theory you can be a Christian without going to church because being a Christian is about your relationship with God and Christ’ he also felt that ‘churchgoing is mandatory for someone that professes to be a Christian’. However, this had to be attendance at the ‘right’ church as he indicated that despite his own parents having been ‘very regular church going Presbyterians’, they ‘would not have been Christians’:

...now I do not mean by that just go to any church. If you are a Christian you will want to stay away from every form of liberalism in my view. Or Charismaticism. Or any kind of extremism. If you are a Christian you will want to go to a church where you can be sure that when a man reads a Bible he is going to preach from that passage or from somewhere in the Bible. I don’t think it’s good for someone who is a Christian to go to a church where the man at the front reads a philosophical essay, it might feed the mind to some extent but it certainly doesn’t feed the heart of the person (Male, 50s, Protestant, Magherafelt, Churchgoer).

A number of other interviewees, predominantly from a Church of Ireland background, felt that while one could be a Christian and not attend church or Mass every week, the public affirmation of one’s belief with like minded individuals was an important part of being a Christian, and several interviewees remarked that they would not like to miss too many weeks of church in a row. Indeed several respondents drew upon the metaphor of a ‘hot coal’ burning out when referring to the importance of practising one’s faith with other like minded individuals.
The majority however felt that one did not have to attend church every week to be a Christian, and unsurprisingly perhaps, this view was predominant amongst those individuals from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds who were non-churchgoers. A small number of churchgoing Protestants and Catholics did not consider regular church or Mass going as a prerequisite for being considered a Christian. One interviewee in Belfast, who did not attend Mass regularly, felt that ‘you can be a Catholic in your own way. I mean, should you say one prayer a day or even if you don’t say a prayer, you are taught God’s always with you’. Those individuals who felt that weekly churchgoing was not central to being a Christian highlighted the centrality of prayer in their own personal relationship with God, even if they didn’t consider themselves to be religious; this included both Catholic and Protestant non-churchgoing interviewees:

You don’t have to go to Mass to be a Catholic, you can say your prayers in the house (Female, 30s, Catholic, Strabane, Occasional churchgoer).

...I don’t want to sound like a hippy, but I do have a sense that if you wish to have a relationship with God, and maybe this is a very Protestant thing actually, it is purely private, And how you conduct that relationship, it doesn’t matter if it’s 9.30 to 11 o’clock structure every week, or is it 24/7. Can you commune with God on the mountain or do you have to be in your local Tabernacle Hall or your local Chapel? I am just instinctly of the view that you can do it anywhere in whatever fashion (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

There were however perceived benefits of going to Mass or church, even irregularly, such as a feeling of comfort that you had done something ‘good’ and worthwhile:

I don’t know. I think, see the feeling that Mass gives you, it’s as if a feeling that you are doing something right, it cleanses you in some way. I don’t know. I mean when we came back from the Novena, it feels like you have done a good deed, you feel good about yourself and you feel good about going to Mass. You feel a bit, not righteous, but that you have done something (Female, 30s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

This issue of whether or not one had to attend church on a regular basis to be considered a Christian was one put to our key informants. Overwhelmingly, the belief was that while it was not necessary to go to church every single week, the need for Christians to worship alongside like minded individuals was very important to the maintenance of the Christian faith, or as one Catholic priest argued that ‘what it means to be a Christian is never to be an island on your own’.

3.6 Social Aspect of Churchgoing

As well as the obvious worshipping associated with attending church on a regular basis, throughout the course of the research it became clear that for many individuals the church was much more than this; there was a social aspect to attending church, particularly in rural and border areas in which the church was often an integral resource in small communities:
To my immediate community...church was really important. And people from the Protestant community that didn’t go to church would have nearly been looked down on. That would have been a big part of the identity. But it was a small community in South Armagh and where I grew up people would have clung to each other, the Protestant community. And been afraid of the bigger community out there...(Female, 20s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

Going to church or Sunday school regularly while growing up was an opportunity to see friends as much as it was an opportunity to worship, while other interviewees referred to the church being their main social outlet, particularly if they were going through difficult periods in their lives. One interviewee, involved until recently with the select Vestry in his local Church of Ireland parish, talked about the socially integrative function that the church played when he moved back to County Armagh, after years of living elsewhere:

I think that certainly part of the benefit that I would have got out of attending church was not solely a religious one, but it was a communal one. In fact, me going back to church when I came back here was part of me re-integrating myself back into this community. Either consciously or unconsciously, but it was. I was being welcomed back, that I was one of this community (Male, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

Another interviewee from a Catholic faith perspective highlighted the social function of Mass on a Sunday for her local community, and while this had declined, still remained important to this day:

The Mass thing was as much a social outing, because that was the one place that everyone from the community was going on a Sunday. That’s where you met people, that’s where people found out what time the football (GAA) match was on, do you know what I mean? All sorts of things, because at that stage there weren’t community centres, there weren’t women’s groups meeting, so the whole news of an area and the whole social context of an area was happening through the church and that was almost incidental (Female, 50s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

Despite these positive connotations of the churches promoting a sense of community amongst parishioners in rural localities in particular, in urban areas it was generally felt that there was a greater distance between the churches and their ‘flock’, and particularly between the main Protestant denominations and the urban Protestant working-class. This issue shall be returned to in section four when we discuss perceptions of the role of the churches during the Troubles.

3.7 Perceptions of the ‘Other’

One aspect of the research was to assess the extent to which perceptions towards members of the ‘Other’ community were impacted upon by religious beliefs. In line with this, interviewees were asked what they perceived to be the main theological differences
between Catholicism and the Protestant denominations, and whether or not they felt that these differences were significant. Unsurprisingly regular churchgoers tended to view the differences as more important compared to those who attended less regularly, and it was generally the case regardless of location that those interviewees of theological conviction from a Protestant perspective were the most likely to view theological differences as ‘crucial’:

...there is a fundamental difference between the Articles of Faith and I know today it’s become almost fashionable to try to blur those boundaries...Catholicism, as an evangelical Christian I don’t have any hatred or distrust of anybody who’s a Catholic but nonetheless I personally do not accept their form, their form of faith is different from mine so therefore I cannot accept it as true, that would be a compromise to my own beliefs. So I see there is still a fundamental difference within the broad Christian church between the Catholic standpoint and the Protestant standpoint (Male, 40s, Protestant, Omagh, Churchgoer).

The main differences between Catholicism and the Protestant denominations referred to related to the status of the Eucharist, the nature of the relationship with God, the authority of priests and the Pope, and church structure and governance. A number of church going Protestants also highlighted Marian theology as something which they found difficult to understand, with the one interviewee believing that praying to the Virgin Mary and the authority of the Pope were crucial differences between Protestantism and Catholicism as ‘it’s really about who do you worship? Do you worship God or do you worship the church? Or someone in the church?’ However, an interviewee from elsewhere in Armagh who was of faith but more questioning of denominationalism commented:

...a lot of Protestants...will think that Catholics believe in the Virgin Mary and the Virgin Mary will get them into Heaven and I think that is that belief around ‘They dance around what the Pope says’, those big barriers. Where a Protestant church will say we don’t allow any wrinkles and we don’t have a Pope. My challenge to them is how many people stand up on a Sunday morning and challenge the preacher? He can get up and say whatever he wants. So do you not have wrinkles, do you not have a ‘Pope’? We have lots of Popes – there’s one in every church on a Sunday morning (Male, 50s, Protestant, Lurgan, Churchgoer).

A young Catholic interviewee also believed that there were misunderstandings of the position of Mary within the Catholic tradition which fed into (mis)perceptions some Protestants may have in this regard:

...we always call it ‘there is something about Mary’, but that is a big issue. And I think as Catholics we misunderstand it, and it gives weight to a complete misunderstanding from other people’s point of view. A lot of people have a very skewed idea of Mary in the Church, and that’s even within our own Church. That people do have this idea that they are praying to Mary, or for her to do things...I couldn’t blame a Protestant for looking in and going, like ‘What are those people at? What’s that about?’ So misunderstanding I think is a key thing (Male, 20s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).
The role of the priest in Catholicism was repeated by a number of Protestants as a key difference, particularly by churchgoers, but also on a number of occasions by non-churchgoing Protestants. One Protestant interviewee, who regarded himself as a Christian but did not attend church, still found it difficult to understand the role of the Pope and the priest, and argued there should be ‘no mediator between God and man except Christ’. Other church going Protestants noted the role of the priest in the ‘forgiving of sins’, the issue of works rather than faith alone (which was viewed as Protestant) and that Protestants have a more personal relationship with God as key differences, with one Church of Ireland member adding that ‘We believe in infant baptism as well which I don’t think they do’.63 A churchgoing female also from County Armagh felt that the theological differences were very significant:

*And this praying for people to get them through purgatory and all the rest of it; and Confession – no matter what you do if you confess to the priest you’re absolved of sin... I would see them as crucial* (Female, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

She added however that her lack of interaction with Catholics or experience of Catholic services meant that she had little first-hand knowledge of what Catholics actually believed:

*That’s maybe my ignorance, I maybe don’t know enough about it, but there are similarities, I’ll give you that. I haven’t been, I’ll be totally honest with you, I haven’t been in many chapels, I’ve never had the reason, never been invited to. My children have been to weddings, lots of weddings in chapels and I’ve seen the order of service; sometimes I look at it and I think ‘Oh’. And the lighting of the candles. I don’t have a problem with candles lit in a church. At Christmas time our church will be full of candles for decoration but lighting a candle and saying a prayer? No, I don’t like that* (Female, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

It should be noted that while some of those individuals from a Protestant perspective with the most deeply-held convictions towards Catholicism were those regular churchgoers with the strongest religious beliefs, some of those individuals with the most conciliatory views towards Catholics were also regular churchgoers of strong religious conviction. Perhaps it is rather more appropriate to state that those who viewed the theological differences as very important tended to be the least likely to have either had any positive interactions with, or been to a service in the church of the ‘Other’. Indeed, several younger interviewees who had attended services in the church of the ‘Other’ felt that there were things which their church could learn from:

*...I do look to the Protestant churches and like what they do. And very often I would go to Fisherwick Presbyterian on a Sunday night. We went here with a youth group and took a lot of young people to their first experience of a service. I would go there and listen and I got a lot out of that, so I would be pretty open to that* (Male, 20s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

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63 Of course infant baptism does take place in the Catholic Church.
There’s that anticipation when the priest comes and that kind of waiting, taking time to pray – that kind of silent reflection, that was really different. Which I think are really lovely aspects as well. So there are things in the Catholic Church that I would really like to see a bit more in our church (Female, 20s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

However, some of those interviewees who had attended funerals or weddings or indeed ecumenical services in the church of the ‘Other’ noted that at times they were very cognisant of the fact they were an outsider and may be perceived as such by the congregation:

And you feel as though everybody in the Chapel is looking at you?...I am very conscious when I go into a Catholic church the whole psyche kicks in and everything is telling me ‘I shouldn’t be here, people see me as being a threat to them, there are hundreds of people who want to get me out of here’, that’s all going on in my head and it is all total myth...So it is all about reconditioning that psyche, and the difficulty is that for most people in Northern Ireland the opportunities simply do not exist for people to do that (Male, 50s, Other faith, Belfast, Churchgoer).

Another interviewee from Armagh noted the nervousness with which his Protestant neighbours recently attended a service in a Catholic Church:

There was a local wedding here, a Catholic wedding and we were at it, I am in a mixed relationship, therefore our Protestant neighbours came and sat beside us and basically were saying, ‘We are sitting here because you know what to do’...and they don’t want to stand out. ‘When do you stand and when do you sit?’ (Male, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

Nevertheless, it tended to be the case that those interviewees who had attended a service within the church of the ‘Other’ tended to play down the differences and focus on the similarities between the churches. This experience in the church of the ‘Other’ and impact upon perceptions of how significant the differences between Protestants and Catholics were was exemplified by the differing views of two Church of Ireland parishioners who were jointly interviewed:

**Interviewee One** Well we are always classed as the closest thing to Catholics, Church of Ireland. I hate that comparison... I cannot really understand the adoration and praying to the Virgin Mary. Praying to her will get you next to Jesus and God. We are taught that you pray directly to God. I don’t agree with praying to the Virgin Mary to intercede. I don’t need anybody to intercede because Jesus does that for me (Female, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Occasional churchgoer).

**Interviewee Two** Well, I went to a Roman Catholic burial service and only for the holy water and this going round the coffin I could have said all the prayers. They were similar to ours in the Church of Ireland. I couldn’t get over it. If anybody had have been beside me they
wouldn’t have known (That she wasn’t a Catholic). The prayers were so similar, it was unbelievable. I didn’t think there was as much…but then I suppose at the beginning of time there was only one religion (Female, 60s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

Alongside attending church services in different communities, other interviewees discussed how as they got to know people through work or social activities they began to question some of the things they had previously believed:

In the past seven or eight years, my understanding of Catholicism has opened up big time. I really have changed my thinking. Where I taught I was (name of department) in a school for 18 years. At that time I would have taken the youngsters to the local Church of Ireland and Baptist churches. But we were very much in the shadow of the Free Presbyterian Church and the DUP. And so I was afraid and I didn’t ever take them to chapel...then I came to work here in 2002, where the majority of my colleagues are Catholics and I have got to know so many of them so well, and I have been invited to attend Catholic weddings, funerals. I would now count many Catholic people among my dearest friends...(Female, 60s, Protestant, Omagh, Churchgoer).

Indeed, a former UDA prisoner recalled being ‘shocked’ to learn that some of his republican contemporaries were not brought up as devout Catholics as he had previously thought:

...religion in my opinion was the last thing... and I have found this out by talking to republicans. When I was growing up I was always led to believe that they (Catholics) were all church going and chapel and saying prayers and Mass, but now I talk to republicans who would be the first ones to turn round and say ‘Fuck are you joking? I don’t go to church’. Which was a surprise for me because we are only learnt what people tell us if you know what I mean. I think I am learning more now than I ever did either in school or growing up (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-Churchgoer).

Interviewees from a Church or Ireland and a Catholic background (and particularly those from a Catholic tradition) were those who were most likely to state that the theological differences were not insurmountable and had become less significant than in previous years. Indeed, three Protestant interviewees felt that while there were still significant differences with Catholics theologically, these differences had lessened since Vatican II.

3.8 Religious Stereotyping?

Despite the feeling amongst some that the differences were becoming less important, some interviewees still discussed what they found ‘uncomfortable’ or ‘hard to believe’ in the practices of the church of the ‘Other’ – even if they themselves were not regular church goers. A non-church going Catholic from Armagh who while feeling there would be ‘very little’ difference between the Protestant denominations and Catholicism apart from ‘this thing round Mary being the Mother of God’ mentioned a key difference being the ‘stauchness’ of Presbyterians and the ‘do’s and don’ts and you can’t pee on a Sunday and
really horrendous things... in some of the places in Antrim you can’t play football on a Sunday, you can’t go to the park’. Another Catholic interviewee from Belfast added:

*I honestly don’t know that much about the Protestant religion. I really don’t. I just know that if you looked at the TV it used to be the fire and brimstone and the scare tactics* (Female, 50s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-Churchgoer).

Indeed there appeared to be greater uncertainty amongst Catholics of what Protestants believed in than the reverse. One Catholic interviewee was unsure whether or not Protestants sang in church, while another was unsure what Protestants believe in ‘*cos there’s so many of them*’. However, the latter interviewee found her first attendance at a Protestant church an interesting comparison to a Catholic Church, and contrasted the ‘dullness’ of the Presbyterian church with the ornate decor of the Catholic Church noting that while not a Mass-goer, she felt that with regards to the Presbyterian church, ‘*I just felt, Oh God, oh no, this isn’t for me like*’. Another non-churchgoing Catholic interviewee in Belfast contrasted what he perceived to be the ‘*more open display of respect within the Protestant church*’ as at funerals ‘*Protestants are usually suited and booted*’ and more ‘*respectful*’ in comparison to Catholic funerals.

Catholic interviewees were more inclined to suggest that their church had most in common with the Church of Ireland which according to more than one Catholic ‘*sure is almost identical to the Catholic Church*’. This was at times contrasted with the more ‘*fire and brimstone*’ type Protestant denominations:

*I have been at a few Church of Ireland services cos I have Protestant relations, so at the Christenings and stuff. They are very much like the Catholic religion...though I think I was in a Presbyterian one and I found it very fire and brimstone type. Like scary sort of thing preaching down at you, you know?...it’s for want of a better word shoved down people’s throats more* (Female, Catholic, 40s, Belfast, Occasional churchgoer).

Another Catholic interviewee stated:

*I don’t think there’s that much difference between Church or Ireland and the Catholic Church. I think the other churches probably there would be more differences say between Presbyterianism and that type of thing. A lot of differences say between Presbyterianism and say the like of Church of Ireland, do you know what I mean? There would be a big difference even as far as attendances and one thing or the other. I would see, and maybe I am wrong, that the Catholic Church in my view, they suffer more from lack of interest than probably a lot of the Protestant churches* (Male, 40s, Catholic, Derry Londonderry, Churchgoer).

The interviewee referred to above felt that Protestant churches would be better attended than Mass, and echoed a number of comments made from members of both religious

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64 That is not to say that Protestant respondents were right in what they viewed as central tenets of Catholic faith, but rather they were more likely to state clearly what they believed that Catholics believed.
traditions, namely that the church of the ‘Other’ was in a stronger position than ‘our’ church, or that religion is more important for ‘them’. The ‘power and authority’ of the Catholic Church was generally viewed as much greater than the ‘fractured family’ of Protestant denominations, and the Catholic Church was viewed generally by churchgoing and non-churchgoing Protestants as having more of a ‘social conscience’ than the Protestant denominations.

One Protestant female who didn’t attend church felt that religion wasn’t as important to Protestants as it was in the past, and when asked if this general decline in the role of religion in the community also impacted upon the Catholic Church the interviewee in question commented, ‘No, I think they stay steady don’t they? Religion is a big part of their lives…’ She added:

They have all their saints, and I am going to be stereotypical now, but they have the candles and the Marys on the wall and they go to Mass so many nights a week and all the rest of it, while we are sent to Sunday school for an hour every Sunday and that’s it…and then they also have it in school, they are religiously taught it in school as well, aren’t they, about the Roman Catholic Church? (Female, 30s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Even for some non-churchgoing Protestants, Catholics were more inclined to follow the teachings of their Church in terms of faith and morality than Protestants were to follow their leaders:

…my view would be that Catholics would take a lot more direction from their church. Protestants maybe don’t have the same respect for authorities in their church that they do in the Catholic Church, that’s just my observation…whereas I think Protestant churches would back off from saying, well some of them, ‘You shouldn’t be having sex before marriage’, or ‘You shouldn’t be having abortions’, ‘We are against this’ (Female, 20s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

On a number of occasions even those individuals who were no longer churchgoing recalled the impact of their religious upbringing on informing their opinions of the ‘Other’. More than one Protestant interviewee recalled being brought up to believe that the Catholic Church wasn’t truly Christian. One young Protestant interviewee now of little religious conviction recalled being brought up with the belief that ‘Catholics don’t read the Bible, they are not allowed to read the Bible…I was told they are only taught what their priests say, or what the Pope tells them to do’. A non-church going Protestant believed that his attendance at Mass dispelled some of the ‘myth’s about Catholicism with which he had been raised:

…the other thing that really struck me was that the number of the laity who participated in some of the processional aspects of the Mass, helping in the Eucharist, the difference in the processions that took place. It certainly struck me that there is this religion that my Protestant background somewhere along the line told me was dominated by the priests but
then I was sitting looking at it thinking there is actually a lot of lay participation in this. And I have been to Catholic weddings with choirs and all the rest of it. And I looked at some Protestant services I have been to and thought ‘Actually the Minister runs the show here’. It might not be the case behind the scenes but I don’t see signs of an awful lot of participatory democracy in this Protestant service – I think this is the wrong way round from what I was told from growing up or what I had a sense of growing up (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Another interviewee from County Armagh added:

Catholics went to Mass on a Saturday night so they didn’t have to go on a Sunday and could do whatever the hell they wanted, that’s what I thought then. So they weren’t Christians, ‘We are Christians. They are heathens, they are going to hell’. That type of thing. Literally. That’s what you would have been brought up to believe (Male, 50s, Protestant, Lurgan, Occasional churchgoer).

There was a general feeling however that this view of Catholics as ‘non-Christians’ was in decline amongst younger Protestants:

I started teaching in (name of institution) in 1984 so that’s 26 years ago. When I would have started all those years ago if I would have asked the class that I was teaching of 30 how many people on a scale of not Christian, Christian, would put a sticker on a line that says the Catholic Church is, I would say over half the people in the class would have put a sticker on not Christian. I don’t think anyone would have put a sticker on Christian…. I would say if you did the same thing today the majority of people would be on the middle to the end of that spectrum and I would say of a class of 30, 2-3 people would say the Catholic Church isn’t Christian so I think what’s happened is Protestants’ views have changed (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Churchgoer).

Catholic interviewees were less inclined to talk about the theology of Protestantism, although one former IRA prisoner who attended a Christian Brothers’ School (and had a Protestant mother) recalled being taught in school that the Reformation was generally the result of Henry VIII ‘being a bit of a lad like and wanting the wives’. Rather, several Catholic interviewees tended to focus on what they viewed as ‘Protestant privilege’ or wealth over their Catholic counterparts rather than on more explicitly theological differences. A republican interviewee in Strabane felt that these economic and class differences were what differentiated Protestants and Catholics as ‘Protestants were always the landowners, always very well off’ while in Belfast a regular Mass goer referred to the ‘greenery and housing estates with big gardens’ in Protestant areas compared with the ‘cramped’ living conditions in inner-city Belfast for Catholics.

Even though many individuals tended to distance themselves and their views in the present from what they had been brought up to believe, at times discussion of the perceived
differences between Catholics and Protestants moved relatively smoothly from the theological into the political realm, for interviewees who were churchgoing and non-churchgoing. An interviewee in Belfast from a non-churchgoing background believed that his Protestant upbringing influenced his ‘very individualistic streak’ despite the fact that ‘when it came to our upbringing, we weren’t christened, (we) were never sent to church’. In relation to attitudes to a political figure such as John Hume, his reputed training as a Jesuit priest was for one Protestant churchgoer indicative of his behaviour in the political sphere where he was ‘economical with the truth’ which echoed what another interviewee had said about being brought up to believe that ‘you couldn’t trust a Catholic, they would stick a knife in your back, they’d be nice to your face and then stab you in the back’.

It should also be noted that at times even those individuals who tended to have conciliatory attitudes towards the ‘Other’ drew upon familiar stereotypes:

...winter health programmes in the Bogside for instance you will have 40-50 volunteers go round the doors, helping the elderly, clear the snow away, making the meals. See in here, I might get five people who I have really bent their arm to try and get them to do things for their own community. It’s a better community spirit (in the Catholic community), they just feel more inclusive. It’s the old Protestant psyche of ‘keep it between these four walls’. If you are in difficulties you keep quiet, and you get on with it. Now that’s good in one way. I think that sometimes Protestants have a better work ethic (Female, 30s, Protestant, Derry Londonderry, Churchgoer).

Summary

It is clear that for most interviewees, the sense of being a Protestant was also aligned with being Northern Irish or British, while Catholic and Irish were relatively conterminous identities also. However, non-churchgoing Catholic interviewees were more likely to define themselves as Catholic than were some of their Protestant counterparts which perhaps indicates a greater sense of residual Catholic identity, as previous research has suggested (Brewer 2004; Hayes and Dowds 2010). Protestant interviewees were also slightly more inclined to indicate that their sense of self had evolved more as they got older, when for some an Irish element to their identity had increased.

While interviewees of faith tended to prioritise this aspect of their identity it was clear that this often overlapped with the traditional dichotomies in terms of being British or Irish, however, for some churchgoing Protestants the term ‘Protestant’ had fallen into disrepute as a result of things which have been done in the name of ‘God and Ulster’. As a result there was some hesitancy amongst certain Protestants to define themselves as such. Rather, they

65 The interviewee was misinformed. Hume began (but did not complete) training for the priesthood at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, which is not a Jesuit institution. The misperception is, however, a revealing indicator of enduring attitudes in some Protestant circles.
focused on the term ‘Christian’ or their denominational adherence, which their Catholic counterparts tended not to do, as some interviewees were of the opinion that the term Christian in the Northern Irish context had become identified with being ‘saved’ or ‘born again’. However, younger Catholic interviewees appeared to adopt the term Christian more readily than their older counterparts.

Clearly religious teaching or ideology can influence even those individuals who are non-churchgoing and who define themselves as ‘non-religious’. In this sense what it means to be religious varies from person to person, as some interviewees defined themselves as ‘non-religious’ and yet prayed daily, occasionally went to church and at times drew upon stereotyped notions regarding the ‘Other’ community, which in part have theological origins. Religion still appears to play a role socially for a number of Catholics and Protestants, particularly in rural areas, where at times going to Mass or church was as much a social function as a religious one. The high rate of attendance of Protestants at Sunday school even when parents were not of faith would also indicate an ongoing social significance of religion in the Northern Irish context.

Although some of the more negative attitudes towards the ‘Other’ community at times were from churchgoing and religious interviewees, which would at first glance appear to correlate with the findings of Boal et al. (1997), some of those with the most conciliatory attitudes towards the ‘Other’ were also regular churchgoers. Rather it appeared to be the case that those individuals, whether they are religious or not, who had little experience of the ‘Other’ were more inclined to draw upon some stereotypical assumptions about the ‘Other’ community. At times these assumptions moved relatively seamlessly from the religious into the political realm. This would also suggest that how we define religion is of crucial importance in assessing its significance in communal identity formation.

If this section has focused on the concept of religion more generally, what it means to people and how religious ideas can shape perceptions, the following section more specifically documents perceptions of the role of the churches during the Troubles.
4. Religion, the Churches and the Troubles

While the project was primarily aimed towards assessing attitudes in the contemporary period, an important element involved reflection upon the role of religion, and particularly the churches, during the Troubles. Interviewees were asked to assess what role, if any, they felt that the churches as institutions had played in reducing or raising levels of violence. This also provided the opportunity to compare and contrast the role of the churches with that of individual church leaders. The research also offered participants the opportunity to reflect upon whether or not the churches all played similar roles during the conflict, or whether there were differences between the actions of the Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church.

4.1 Institutions versus Individuals

A key finding of the research of John Brewer et al. (2011) was the perception that although key individuals within church structures were important in peace-building activities, the churches as institutions during the Troubles did not do enough in terms of actively contributing to the ending of violence. Given that the timeframe of our research overlapped with that of the Brewer research team, it is unsurprising that our research also appeared to support this argument.

The feeling that none of the main churches institutionally did enough to try and stop the violence was relatively prevalent amongst both churchgoing and non-churchgoing Catholics and Protestants:

*I think they had a ‘head in the sand’ attitude. I think that they should have been more outspoken. Outsiders looking in maybe thought that they condoned some of the things that happened because they didn’t speak up, but I also appreciate that in a little community it probably wasn’t very easy to speak up* (Female, 50s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

A member of the Church of Ireland suggested that if the churches as institutions had done enough during the Troubles ‘a lot of it wouldn’t have happened’. However, this argument was qualified with the perception that the churches at some level acted as a restraining factor which ensured that the scale of the violence did not reach the levels of other conflicts. As such her main indictment of the churches focused on their passivity or paralysis in terms of working outside their immediate congregations and communities. The most critical of the role of the churches in this regards included some regular church goers and clergy members, but tended to come predominantly from non-churchgoing interviewees, whether Catholic or Protestant.

There was however an acknowledgement that certain church leaders strongly condemned violence from the pulpit and provided a moral lead to their congregation. Praise therefore tended to be given to individual ministers or priests with regards to condemning violence...
rather than the churches as institutions. In this regard the role of one minister in Armagh in condemning the murder of the three Reavey brothers by the UVF in 1976 was praised:

*I can think of others which were as conciliatory as they could be. In other words, 'Don't wish this upon our neighbours'...And he (the Minister) gave a sermon which was basically that the people who killed the Reaveys also targeted the people from Glennane factory (Kingsmill victims), because action and reaction are equal and opposite. And he got threats for saying that. But also of how he maintained a friendship, he had prayed at the bedside of the Reaveys because he was a chaplain in Daisey Hill hospital (Male, 60s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).*

For others however the pulpit condemnations of murders were not enough and often came tragically too late:

*I think by the time the violence had kicked in the churches had done so little to prevent it that they were on a sticky wicket, and what essentially happened was you got pulpit denunciations and that was usually when it was too late – at fucking funerals when someone had been killed. And by that stage in a sense the churches were pretty much always going to preach a pretty straightforward Christian Gospel - if you break the Ten Commandments, 'Turn the other cheek', blah blah, blah... But by that stage it didn't matter...the pulpit stuff probably had to be done, but it was a drop in the ocean by that stage (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).*

Rather than viewing the preaching of the Gospel after various killings as a futile act, a Catholic priest spoken to felt that it was important that the churches provide moral leadership to both communities, as ‘war is contrary to the purposes of God’. After one particular incident which impacted upon him deeply, the IRA murder of UDR man Denis Taggart on 4th August 1986 in Battenberg Street,66 the priest in question began visiting bereaved families together on both sides of the interface.67 Reflecting on the purposes of such visits he contended:

...it was a very powerful witness really to the way the church would react to a tragedy. I always thought that every funeral arising out of the Troubles ought to be an ecumenical funeral, bringing clergy together from both sides as it is doing now. That in a way was a beginning of shared ministry to bereaved, broken people.

4.2 Politics and the Pulpit

Despite the praise for those ministers and priests who specifically condemned the violence from the pulpit, other interviewees recalled at different times and under differing circumstances hearing ‘fairly blood-curdling sermons’. Although Ian Paisley’s speeches and pronouncements were those most likely to be referred to in relation to inflaming an already

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66 McKittrick et al. (1999: 1045).
67 With a colleague from the Methodist church.
tense political situation, a small number of those from a Protestant background recalled hearing political speeches made in their church. These pronouncements tended to be either overtly political or more subtle and often based upon theology, but with a clear link to ongoing political developments:

...one of the things I remember about Sunday school was, one of our teachers was a UDR Sergeant, heavily involved with the UDR part-time and his Sunday school services were basically a political rant slagging off the IRA and whoever at the time. I remember at the time, any atrocity that happened during that week, he would have brought it up and it was all ‘Remember, not an inch, no surrender. Look at what these people are doing to our country’. It was very much about embedding that mentality into young people (Male, 40s, Protestant, Derry Londonderry, Occasional churchgoer).

Clearly many individuals felt that political pronouncements within the confines of the church were inappropriate. Indeed, a female member of the Church of Ireland recalled leaving the Presbyterian church in the aftermath of such political pronouncements:

The first time I encountered politics in church was the reason I left the Presbyterian Church...the Sunday after the Anglo-Irish Agreement you had a hell-fire and damnation sermon from the Presbyterian Minister. And I vowed I would never go back to that church. I left the Presbyterian Church altogether.

A number of interviewees reflected that while the speeches in their church often were not explicitly hostile to the ‘Other’ community, nevertheless, they tended to condemn the violence which was being perpetrated by the ‘Other side’ and spoke little about violence being committed by ‘our’ side:

But I can honestly say that the church I went to, there was no sort of condemning Catholics or that political stuff, but it was very much I suppose support to your own community and seeing terrorists as the other side and law and order as something that we upheld (Male, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Occasional churchgoer).

This issue in terms of ‘ministering to your own flock’ was one which several clergy referred to as a constant challenge. One former Church of Ireland Minister suggested that a difficulty he faced in terms of his ministry during the Troubles was ending up ‘as the political voice rather than as the religious one’. In all likelihood this was a challenge that various other clergy struggled with, with some having more difficulties than others in terms of managing their role as a voice for ‘their’ community as well as trying to reach out across the divide:

The juxtaposition of those two things were a constant challenge to me in my work and therefore you developed as much vocabulary as you could which was religiously based but obviously had to reflect something of what ‘your people’ were going through. So, a religious leader in the time of the Troubles had to adopt this semi-political face simply because the
politicians were living and working in a vacuum at that stage. In fact, there was no political
dialogue at that stage at all.

However a key challenge for clergy who had adopted a ‘political face’ and were perceived as
ministering to their own flock was that this could be perceived negatively by members of
the ‘Other’ community. At an extreme level this led to particular clergy developing a
reputation for being ‘sympathetic to terrorists’. While a Monsignor interviewed noted that
he had condemned ‘all violence’ and argued that republican violence ‘broke the laws of
God, it broke the laws of morality’, as a result of his prolific writing and campaigning on
behalf of the rights of prisoners and highlighting alleged British state abuses (including
deaths as a result of plastic bullets), he was viewed as simply being sympathetic to physical
force republicanism. He reflected on the difficulties associated with speaking politically
during the height of the violence:

Where do you get the truth? You are depending on the calendars of state papers. That’s one
side, the state. But what about Mrs Murphy who lives down the street? Her son has been
shot – what’s her statement? Where are the witnesses there? So I was determined from the
start to record. It’s not that I ignored the killings of soldiers or policemen, we did write on the
sacredness of human life, Father (name) and I. But who else was doing this other thing? And
then you were looked upon in propaganda as aiding and comforting the terrorist… That’s not
to say we didn’t condemn the killing of policemen or soldiers. But then because you did that
you got branded – ‘Oh your reputation goes before you’… I mean I went to the funerals of
prison officers who were shot, and that had been ignored and also condemned. I went to one
in Portadown and the clergy ignored me completely. And it wasn’t easy for you to go into a
hostile environment in Portadown. In fact the Minister got up and in the middle of it all he
mentioned these pamphlets, you know, without naming me. And they all turned round and
looked at me.

While perhaps one of the more extreme examples, nevertheless this experience highlights
the difficulties which some clergy members faced when trying to balance discussing political
issues in the public sphere with their pastoral duties as clergy. However, there were also
challenges associated with church leaders not coming out in the public and political sphere
to condemn particular events for fear of alienating ‘their’ community. In this regard, as a
member of Pax Christi in the 1980s, one individual talked about his disappointment at the
role of the local Catholic Church in the aftermath of an IRA mortar bomb attack which killed
9 RUC officers on 28th February 1985:

We decided to hold a peace vigil the next night. Now the media typically dubbed what we
were doing as a ‘protest’ when we thought we were bearing witness. But they had an edge
and an angle on it when we were trying to express sympathy with everybody and appeal to
people’s hearts and not people’s ideology. But the media were difficult because they tried to
portray peace activity as anti-the men of violence – we weren’t anti-anything. We were for
certain values. But I went to the clergy, the churches, thinking that all I had to do was
organise a flat-bed truck and they could stand up and say some prayers to do some readings. But the leadership of the Catholic Church didn’t want to do it and I found myself having to do it and it was the start of a number of incidents which started me to look critically and get hurt at the church for not taking a stand. And the problem when I look back now for a lot of Catholic priests was that they were pastorally involved with victims, with perpetrators and they knew how complex it was and the line between perpetrators and victims very often became blurred, between cause and consequence. Between behaviour and the deeper person.

In the emotive days of the violence, highlighting perceived ‘injustices’ caused by the ‘Other’ community appeared to be heard much more loudly and clearly than were the condemnations of violence caused by individuals from within one’s own community. While condemning violence from any source was a challenge taken up by many church leaders, other clergy, as the latter example indicates, preferred to stay silent for fear of offending those within one’s own wider community.

4.3 Led rather than leading?

In this regard, there was general consensus that despite those individuals from within the church structures who had made ‘brave stands’ in relation to condemning violence, those church leaders who personally would have liked to have been more vocal in their condemnations and more proactive in terms of building bridges with churches from different denominations were put in a difficult position vis-a-vis their congregation. At its worst perhaps this was illustrated by Reverend David Armstrong being forced to abandon his parish in Limavady in 1984 after he received death threats for exchanging Christmas pleasantries with Father Kevin Mullan of the local Catholic Church (Bruce 1986: 193).

While this was undoubtedly one of the more extreme outcomes of such a position, on a number of occasions this was referred to as being a genuine difficulty for individuals within church structures when attempting to involve their church in community relations based initiatives. Again the Monsignor interviewed discussed the difficulties facing a Presbyterian Minister after returning from a joint clergy forum visit to Rome in the 1990s:

One of the Ministers had put a note on his parish very innocently that he would be away with the clergy forum in Rome. One of his congregation, who was editor of (name of newspaper), splashed a big page the next week in the newspaper – ‘Clergy visit Pope’. And he had it that we had a private visit with the Pope. Not a word about what our programme was, about the British Embassy, the Protestant churches and what we were there for. The Presbyterian Minister who was an Orangeman got in to real trouble and his job was in jeopardy. Whereas before we could have visited the Presbyterian Church, we couldn’t do that again. After that he became like Nicodemus by night. He still wanted to be associated with us. And not all his congregation agreed with that. But it only takes one or two to spoil the thing.

Speaking of his own experience much more recently, a Presbyterian Minister reflected on the impact that his attendance at events with members of Sinn Féin had on his congregation:

...the people who are resisting, and there are people in my church who resist – I’ve a few people in my church who don’t come now because they think that what I’m doing is terrible. Imagine, a Minister talking to someone from the other community is so bad they have stopped coming to church. I just feel so sad for those people. I’m talking with some of them and we will win some of them back. But there are lots of people like that. Now we cannot drag people to where they don’t want to be. We have to try and continue to reach out into the hearts of those people who don’t see it the way we see it, because I think the seeds are being sown which are not apparent in their lives, which will become apparent in their communities.

Nevertheless, despite the opposition he faced in some quarters, he suggested that his position in his church had allowed him to attempt to reach out to others and that broadly speaking the congregation had been supportive for him to ‘do what hasn’t been done before’. Indeed, one Methodist Minister, who is currently involved along with other Protestant and unionist leaders in dialogue with republicans on the back of Declan Kearney’s recent comments, noted that the support of his congregation was one of the main reasons he was able to involve himself in peace-building activities, support which other ministers or priests may not have received to the same degree:

Some of the things that I’ve been doing I’ve been embarrassed about being seen as an individual but I couldn’t have done those in the way I did without the blessing of my church, either my local congregation or the church at large. That to me was very, very important – that I wasn’t going out there a lone ranger, that I knew that the church, whilst it couldn’t be upfront in a lot of the things we were doing, we were discreet anyhow, but that I wasn’t alone - there were others with me who were doing some things, building some kind of relationship and engagement.

The challenges of being at the behest of one’s congregation was felt to be particularly problematic for Presbyterian Ministers, as ‘participatory democracy’ gives the congregation a greater say in who their Minister will be when compared to the Church of Ireland and Catholic churches. However, other interviewees suggested that the fact that Presbyterian Ministers tend to spend more time in one parish than do Church of Ireland or Methodist Ministers meant they had a longer time over which to build relationships. Nevertheless, rather than some church leaders leading, some were of the opinion that they were led by their parishioners.

Aside from this general criticism of indecisiveness and of being at the behest of the congregation, at times other interviewees were more harsh in their criticism of the role of the churches during the Troubles. Some suggested that rather than being a passive victim of communal division which was beyond their control, the churches were ‘part of the problem’. These views were best reflected in the discussion of the role of both the Protestant and Catholic churches specifically during the Troubles.

4.4 Working-class and the churches

There have been numerous examples of church related initiatives seeking to engage with working-class loyalist areas, such as the Church of Ireland clergy forums in the dioceses of Down and Connor and Dromore. The work of the late Billy Mitchell in conflict resolution and peace-building through the LINC Resource Centre in Belfast with marginalised loyalist communities was not as part of the churches directly, but a personal endeavour based upon a conversion experience that Mitchell had while in prison, although the work of LINC with working-class areas has been widely praised. These are but two of many faith inspired grassroots peace-building activities which have attempted to engage with working-class Protestant communities.

Despite this, many interviewees believed that more generally a disconnect had developed between the Protestant working-class and the main Protestant denominations during the Troubles which various grass-roots initiatives have thus far failed to resolve. This is clearly an issue which the Protestant churches are aware of given the organisation of a seminar by the three main Protestant denominations70 on February 17th 2011 in the Ramada Hotel in Belfast entitled ‘Re-engaging with Loyalist communities – where do we start?’ 71

At one level this perceived disconnect, which had developed during the Troubles, was linked to a belief that people could not see the relevance of the church to their daily lives as some congregations did not talk about ‘real’ issues which were impacting upon people living in socio-economically deprived areas:

I even get to speak in churches about the work that I do... about inner-city loyalist communities and the need for church engagement. It feels so dissonant in comparison to what has been talked about before. I just find that the church community, and this is very general, is slightly self indulgent and seems to be considerably removed from some of the raw realities of post-conflict Northern Ireland (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Occasional Churchgoer).

Another interviewee who also spoke in church about social issues facing the working-classes, and young people in particular, felt that the apathy within communities towards the

70 Under the auspices of Church Resources.
71 The talk was given by Dr John Kyle, East Belfast PUP councillor.
churches which had developed during the conflict was reciprocated from those within the congregations towards neighbouring working-class areas:

*I’ll bring things up and there is silence. I look round the room and then they will move onto something else because they probably think I am some sort of a radical. And yet I am dealing with kids who have all sorts of issues every day of their life...But I find that within Christian youth work it’s about ‘We did this’ and ‘So many young people became Christians’. And maybe there is part of me that thinks well that’s great, but it always seems to be that our agenda is to convert people and maybe that’s where I am weak, maybe that’s where I fall* (Male, 50s, Protestant, Lurgan, Occasional churchgoer).

Other individuals suggested that there were distinctive class differences between the Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations (except for the Elim and Pentecostal churches), and that the Catholic Church tended to be more all embracing of all Catholics, regardless of social status:

*...Catholic churches are very mixed in terms of their class. If you go into a Mass you’ll see people turning up in the overalls and the suits, the Mercs are driving up with the bikes. Masses I’ve been at recently for funerals, I mean I’ve been amazed by the class divide that’s broached in the middle of that church, you don’t find that so much in Protestant churches in the main* (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Churchgoer).

Two interviewees recounted examples of their own experience with their church, one a Church of Ireland congregation, the other involving a Girls’ Brigade in a Presbyterian church, to indicate what they perceived to be an ‘elitism’ from within certain congregations. With regards the former:

*...going to church was the be all and end all and if you didn’t you weren’t worth bothering about, and there was very much a social class thing...I wouldn’t say it was so much a ‘fashion parade’, but it was certainly an aspect that the Minister didn’t respect those families that didn’t get to church or didn’t go to Sunday school. Almost as if he had given up on them, and that was kind of compounded then whenever I came into community development work in 1996 I went to work in (name of area). I had known the Minister all my life, but even speaking to him it was quite obvious that he hadn’t very much respect for the people of (name of area) – the working-class community that he was supposed to be covering. I remember one time we had no facilities in the very early days and we approached him and asked if he could use the church hall for a disco to kind of get the youth club up and going. And he looked at me and said ‘We don’t want that riff raff up here’* (Male, 40s, Protestant, Derry Londonderry, Occasional churchgoer).

Similarly, a perceived ‘snobbery’ amongst Protestant clergy was contrasted by one interviewee with priests’ willingness to get involved in affairs which impact upon the working-class Catholic community:
And then you have priests – nothing happens with Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD) or whatever in this town, but Father Cranny is on the radio and says ‘Any of these people want to come and talk to me, I will liaise with you’. He is right plank by in the middle of what is going on. He says ‘Come to me at the chapel and I will liaise’. We don’t have none of that in the Protestant churches...Priests will dirty their feet to go in and talk to whoever (Female, 30s, Protestant, Derry Londonderry, Churchgoer).

In contrast to the perceived decline in urban Protestant church attendance as a result primarily of this middle-class/working-class schism, declining church attendance at Catholic churches was attributed more generally to overall trends towards secularisation or at least the ‘privatisation’ of religion. However three individuals had stopped going to Mass as a result of the scandals impacting upon the Catholic Church in recent years, and particularly after the publication of the Cloyne report, while another young female churchgoer had stopped giving to the collection as a result of the scandals. A male interviewee from Derry Londonderry felt that the scandals had led to the Catholic Church losing its sense of ‘moral authority’.

However, the estrangement of the Protestant working-class from the mainstream denominations was perceived to have been a longer-term decline which had been exacerbated by the violence of the Troubles. According to two Presbyterian Ministers, the exodus of many Protestants from the inner-city suburbs as a result of the violence meant that the churches were left in a much weaker leadership position. However, they questioned whether or not this meant that the Protestant denominations had stopped contributing to the life of local communities. Both men argued that in actual fact it was the mainstream Protestant denominations which had managed to keep the youth sector going in working-class Protestant communities, through organisations such as the Boys’ and Girls’ Brigade. One of the interviewees commented:

It’s a bit too easy for the community to say that the church makes little or no contribution to this community because what they are unwilling to accept, not all of them but a large proportion, is that the life of the church is by definition part of the life of the local community. What they are saying mostly is that the bit of the community in which we operate is not the area in which you operate - therefore you are not one of us. Which is seriously disempowering to the church sector. Take the Boys’ Brigade, which is by far the largest boys’ organisation by a long, long way – it is always church based. A massive proportion of the lads who are in Boys’ Brigade from the Anchor Boys right up...have no connection with the church other than their membership of the BB, their families probably have no connection with the church. So to say that the church is not contributing to the life of the community, to imply that is actually simply not true. But I do accept it is true if you say ‘the church is not part of the local community forum which we run’.

Protestant clergy members did suggest that the attitudes of some of the ‘drive-in’ congregations who tended to be predominantly middle-class could undoubtedly be
alienating for some individuals from working-class backgrounds and may in part be theologically based in terms of having to ‘opt in’ to become a Christian within Protestantism, with Christians at times preferring to remain ‘separate from the world’.

Regardless of how these perceptions have been formed, and no matter whether they are based on attitudes towards social-class or theology, the feeling of being perceived by others as ‘unworthy’ of attending church was a key issue for some working-class Protestants, and it is interesting that no working-class Catholics expressed similar sentiments with regards going to Mass:

*I just stopped (going). I didn’t like it, I didn’t enjoy it. Truthfully what put me off was because we were entering the phase where the Troubles had started. I always felt that the church and the community were totally separate because the people who went to the church were people who lived in bigger houses and all, they always had hats and lovely coats; they weren’t like real people to me. I used to call them the Sunday people – I never seen them (sic) during the week but you always seen them on the Sunday and they used to sit like in cliques and you knew they were talking about people* (Female, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

On reflection the interviewee in question was quick to praise the current minister of the local church who was working with the local community, even providing use of the church facilities for community meetings and occasionally church services were held within the community centre. She added:

*...the Minister approached me ten or 11 years ago just as a volunteer worker in the area and he said ‘You know the churches want to come back into the area’. I said ‘The area never left yous (sic), yous left us’. People in the community felt ostracised and it was to do with the conflict. It wasn’t the church itself, it was the people who attended the church, it was like judgemental. A church was supposed to offer solace and comfort and I don’t think it was done for a lot of people. I know there was women in this estate was single parents because their men were in gaol or people’s houses was raided and it was the talk of the church you know what I mean?... you were another breed* (Female, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Further building upon this theme, a female interviewee from Armagh who still went to church reasonably regularly recalled feeling isolated from others and ‘looked down upon’ within the church when her husband, a member of the UVF, was imprisoned during the Troubles. Another interviewee in Belfast also commented on this perception:

*...we were the bogey men, these communities. These communities was where the terrorists lived and all the rest of it so the churches would have kept themselves to themselves and wouldn’t have supported areas like this. That is probably why there is no religious belief in*
communities like this anymore. While on the Catholic side they would have supported them and all the rest of it (Female, 30s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

This latter assertion that the church of the ‘Other’ supported their community more so than ‘ours’ did was a relatively prominent one throughout the research. Indeed, the perceived strength in unity of the ‘Other’ community with ‘their’ church was perhaps best illustrated in discussions on the nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and physical force Irish republicanism during the Troubles.

4.5 The Catholic Church and Irish Republicanism

‘Let others say what they will about them; harsh words will not hurt them now. The fact remains that they are flesh of our flesh, they are bone of our bone’ (Comments of the priest presiding over the funeral of one of the three IRA members shot dead by the UVF in Cappagh in March 1991. Referenced in McKittrick et al. 1999: 1228).

While Traditional Unionist Voice leader, Jim Allister, once spoke of the ‘insoluble marriage of Roman Catholicism to militant Irish Republicanism’ (Bruce 1986: 122) and former Grandmaster of the Orange Order, Robert Saulters, much more recently referred to dissidents as the ‘Roman Catholic IRA’, former Westminster MP, Bernadette McAliskey once referred to the Catholic Church as ‘among the best traitors mother Ireland has ever had’ (Excerpt taken from Rose 1971: 252).

These comments tend to reflect the differing views amongst Protestant and Catholic interviewees on the nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and most specifically the PIRA during the Troubles. In particular the diverging perceptions were illustrated by views on the role of the Church at the time of the hunger-strikes in 1981.

For a small number of interviewees, from both a churchgoing and non-churchgoing Protestant background, there was a perception that the Catholic Church and the republican movement were working ‘hand in glove’ at the time of the hunger-strikes. For several individuals this ‘connection’ had existed prior to 1981 and, as such, the alleged involvement of Father James Chesney in the Claudy bomb in 1972 merely confirmed what they felt they had ‘known all along’:

Some of the priests...are not what I would call Christian priests...And there was a priest in (name of area) and he was definitely down the paths of the republicans and the IRA and he

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73 The Claudy bomb occurred on 31st July 1972. For further information on the allegations in relation to Father Chesney see the report of the Police Ombudsman Northern Ireland which was published in October 2010. The report is available online at http://www.policeombudsman.org/PublicationsUploads/Claudy.pdf Accessed May 4th 2011.
supported it...And it was said of this time by people of his own religion that (name of town) will ‘light up’ once he has gone there, and it did (Female, 60s, Protestant, Armagh, Non-churchgoer).

It should be noted that this view of priests being actively engaged in the conflict was one commented upon by only three interviewees, however a more general link which was perceived to exist between the Catholic Church and republicanism was discussed by others in relation to the role of a number of priests in mediation efforts during the hunger-strikes. Another was the fact that the hunger-strikers were given Christian burials on consecrated ground:

...The church on one hand were coming out and condemning it, but on the other hand they were welcoming them in their paramilitary regalia... it just reinforced the views that they are supporting what’s going on... I am not really aware of any Protestant church which would have had a paramilitary display as such in the grounds of the actual church. The churches didn’t allow any actual trappings or gun salutes or anything like that, that never took place in the grounds of the actual churches. They may have buried them people but it was different. Whereas in the Roman Catholic community you had the actual displays in the graveyards (Male, 40s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

The role of priests officiating at the funerals of IRA volunteers, such as that of Father Des Wilson at the funeral of Ardoyne IRA member Larry Marley in April 1987 or the symbolism of 60 priests attending the funeral of hunger-striker Raymond McCreesh (Garrigan 2010: 153), was brought up on several occasions by Protestant interviewees. This was contrasted generally with the view that Protestant churches would not have done the same for loyalist paramilitaries, although a Presbyterian Minister questioned this, commenting, ‘As for Protestants – who buried all the loyalist gunmen then? Protestant church people buried them. Who ministered to their families? Protestant church people’.

However, the lay interviewee referred to previously disagreed with this analysis and continued to argue that ‘true’ Protestants would not have involved themselves with paramilitarism, but rather would have joined the security forces:

On the Protestant side if anybody had have been true to their church they wouldn’t have been involved in the terrorism activities. If they were true Protestants they wouldn’t have been, because they would have joined the security forces. And the Orange Order did play a significant role in persuading young people not to join the paramilitaries, believe it or not. A lot of young people would have went to the paramilitaries only for the Orange Order. In the Roman Catholic community, I think the Roman Catholic Church didn’t take a very good lead and a lot of the priests and churches were either directly or indirectly involved with the terrorism campaign (Male, 40s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).
While several Protestant interviewees focused on the impact of republican paramilitary funerals which were conducted by a priest as indicating a close relationship between the Catholic Church and republicans, Catholic interviewees suggested that there were pastoral and theological reasons as to why priests presided over the funerals of individuals who had been involved in paramilitaries. One of our Catholic key informants argued that the differing purposes of funerals in the Protestant and Catholic traditions required a more nuanced analysis than has often been the case:

...in the Protestant traditions there’s generally a view that you don’t pray for the dead, whereas Catholics believe that you do. To go to a Protestant funeral is to celebrate the life of someone. To go to a Catholic funeral is that, but also to express sympathy with the family, the same as with Protestants, but also to pray for the person because their journey is just in a different phase...therefore people looking at clergy presiding over (paramilitary) funerals would have presumed they were there to celebrate, but that’s a gross oversimplification.

Similarly, two priests suggested that theological reasons, rather than showing support, were the reasons that priests had conducted the funerals of IRA members:

...in the Catholic religion, it doesn’t matter if it’s a Cardinal or an IRA man, whoever it is in front of you, their belief in an after-life and purgatory and that sort of thing means that the Requiem Mass is a plea for mercy – whether it’s a bishop or a priest or whatever. Everybody is a sinner...whereas sometimes that was misunderstood by Protestant churches who didn’t have that kind of theology because so often their funeral rite was in praise and thanksgiving for the person who was dead.

At the end of the day, you can’t divide people as a pastor – you leave that to God. Leave the judgement at the end of the day to God. A priest has to be sensitive to that and also sensitive to the family as well. The whole story about somebody is not his IRA membership...or Shankill Butcher membership. There is more than that label to be put on, and there is more to human destiny than what we could ever confirm.

Republicans themselves noted there were still disputes over the right to bring a Tricolour into the chapel during republican funerals: 74

They made at the end of the day, the issues of the flags at the funerals and all of that – nothing was said over in England whenever they were burying the soldiers with the flags in the churches. If you go down to St. Anne’s Cathedral it’s coming down with the whole paraphernalia of the whole British military and all that (Male, 50s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

74 In many cases the flag must not be draped on the coffin on entry to the church – it must be folded and placed on top of the casket. Although in some areas deals have been arranged with the clergy, there are also priests who will still refuse this practice.
Nevertheless, for some churchgoing and non-churchgoing Protestants, the perception remained that the Catholic Church supported the republican movement, while the Protestant churches were hostile towards loyalist paramilitaries:

*I suppose there is a difference between the Protestant churches and the Catholic churches because the Catholic Church came out and quite openly supported the republican cause, whereas the Protestant churches said ‘We don’t want to be aligned or associated or supporting any loyalist organisation’. They very much sat in the unionist camp rather than in the loyalist camp…*(Female, 20s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Another Protestant, who worked on a regular basis with former loyalist prisoners praised the Catholic Church for their role in the prison disputes which she contrasted with the ‘neglect’ of the loyalist paramilitaries by the Protestant denominations:

*I’ll give the Catholic Church their place, the Catholic Church even when Protestants were shouting about prison rights went in to see them, the Protestant Ministry disowned them…Yet it was Catholic politicians and the Catholic Church who actually listened about the conditions and everything else* (Female, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Only four interviewees from a Protestant background directly talked about what they perceived to actually be a complex relationship between the Catholic Church and republicanism:

*I mean you just have to read some of the ‘comms’ out of the (H) blocks and the discussions…particularly about Father Denis Faul…people like Cardinal O’ Fiaich, Cahal Daly, who republicans hated, absolutely despised. So there was a real issue even before the hunger strikes, there were always very complicated relationships between republicans and the Catholic Church, a much more complex relationship than that which is perceived in Protestant areas…And yes, you did have the radical priests, Father Des Wilson, Father Murray, Father McVeigh and all the rest of it who were overtly republican, but effectively ended up without parishes, they were just swamped by the hierarchy within the Catholic Church* (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

The interviewee also referred to disagreements between the Catholic Church and republicans in relation to the ACE employment schemes in inner-city areas in the 1980s, which were also discussed by a former republican prisoner, as indicative of the hostility of the church to the IRA:

*because they were pro-state, and they were anti-republican. They then downloaded the money which was afforded to them by Mrs Thatcher in the early to mid-1980s when Bishop Daly stood up in Twinbrook and said that money will be put to use in areas through the Catholic Church. So those who the church handpicked would be getting the resources* (Male, 50s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).
The interviewee in question believed that not only had the Church taken a ‘hypocritical’ stance over the ACE schemes, but they were hypocritical with regards to their attitude to violence more generally:

...to come in and tell us that this is murder, or this is wrong and that’s wrong and these are the people that slaughtered millions over the years in regards to Crusades, the Inquisitions, the Reformation – and these people are the same ones that are telling me to take on a military machine such as the British is wrong? (Male, 50s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Another PIRA ex-prisoner, while also critical of the Church, did however acknowledge that the use of violence put the Catholic Church in a difficult position given the moral argument linked to ‘thou shalt not kill’, although he was critical of what he perceived to be the Church’s lack of condemnation of the British state in comparison to republican violence:

...some of their attacks on republicanism, ok, I can understand if the priest’s there, somebody gets killed, there’s a moral thing to that there I know he has to sort of condemn the fact that somebody has been murdered...But when he fails to attack the whole apparatus of the state and excess of it and how it operates then it clearly puts a contradiction (Male, 40s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

This perception of ‘siding with the state’ was discussed by one key informant as being the beginning of her parting of the ways with the church in the 1970s. She believed that the Catholic Church in Ireland refused to practice liberation theology, and offered little support to ‘the poor, for those against whom the government took unfair action’. She continued:

The church no longer in the 1970s to me had a purpose in terms of what I thought it was...when I grew up the church was a communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and by the time I’d got to the mid-1970s the church offered neither community forgiveness nor compassion...and the church took their side with the government and were much more concerned not to be seen on the side of the lawbreaker, the rioter, the terrorist, the prisoner, than they were not to be seen supporting wrongdoing.

During his 1979 visit to Ireland, Pope John Paul II appealed ‘on his knees’ for the Provisionals and others to stop the violence. Republican interviewees believed that the fact that these calls to stop the violence were not heeded indicated that the Catholic Church had little influence over the PIRA, despite what many of their Protestant counterparts may suggest:

I’m not sure that the churches have that power and influence, it is a different type of influence they have. I do remember at the time of the hunger-strike some of us talking to Father Faul saying ‘Why does the Cardinal not come out and condemn the British

government?’ and Father Faul came back with what I felt was a reasonable answer – it wouldn’t make any difference. The Cardinal if he had come out and condemned the British Government, they wouldn’t have listened. He said, ‘Let’s face it, the Cardinal has also advised you to come off your hunger-strike and you did not listen’ (Male, 50s, Catholic, Armagh, Non-churchgoer).

The interviewee continued:

*If the Catholic Church had said that the IRA must stop as they did every day of the week, you could have gone through the newspapers every day and probably found one Catholic clergyman at one level or another calling for an end to this. The IRA didn’t listen. At the same token the Protestant churches were calling on the IRA to quit as well, the churches were constantly calling for an end to this bloodshed, but I mean nobody listened. Now, not nobody, But those that were engaged didn’t listen. I suppose you have to keep that in mind, how much influence they had* (Male, 50s, Catholic, Armagh, Non-churchgoer).

In contrast to a number of Protestant interviewees, republicans focused on the disputes and tension between themselves, the movement and the Catholic Church over their perceived lack of support for the hunger-strikers; for some, the hunger-strikes had been a turning point and had led to resentment against the Church. One former republican prisoner found the Church pronouncement that the hunger-strikers were ‘committing suicide’ particularly difficult to accept:

*I would have completely sort of stopped (going to Mass) around the hunger-strike and it was a parting of the ways for me with the Catholic Church were they rightly or wrongly, the view was that they were opposed to the hunger-strike and supported the British establishment in the north. Like they were coming out making statements that they were committing suicide and this type of stuff. So we had a local priest, Father (name of priest) you called him, he would have been prominent around Bloody Sunday you know, but he just was really pro-British...*(Male, 40s, Catholic, Strabane, Non-churchgoer).

Criticism of the Catholic Church was not limited to republicans; a number of Catholic interviewees not involved with the republican movement echoed many of the same sentiments. For one female interviewee from a Catholic (as opposed to a republican background) in Belfast, who was only three at the time of the hunger-strikes, the Catholic Church ‘did not do enough’ at the time to help the prisoners. Another interviewee from the border region added:

*...we would have had some stuff here about things like flags going in on coffins. We had a bit of conflict at the time of the hunger-strikes where people wanted the churches opened at night to hold a vigil and some priests were happy enough to move offside and allow the church to stay open...and some priests took the line of, ‘This is my church and this is not going to happen’...It would have been dependent on the priest and how sensible he was*
because it is the people’s church, and if people were going to do nothing in the church all night but only pray, what was the problem? But in some areas it was the priest’s decision to be awkward and it did cause some annoyance (Female, 50s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

The strength in unity of the Catholic Church, community and republicanism which was perceived by a number of Protestant interviewees, regardless of religious commitment, and rejected by republicans, was suggested by a small number of Catholics to have existed within the Protestant churches, who had done much more for ‘their people’ during the conflict:

Well, I think from being a Catholic, the Catholic Church let a lot of people down. They didn’t, I suppose, they didn’t take a stand that the likes of the Presbyterian churches would have took. They are more leaders like that way...the likes of Paisley and all, he would be Presbyterian and all. He would be very outspoken, you know, ‘You are treading on the Protestant’ people and he is out at everything. We don’t really have that in the Catholic Church. I know you had Monsignor Faul and Bishop Daly and that who were very outspoken, but I mean that’s only a wee drop in the ocean compared. That’s only a small number of the Catholic Church hierarchy. I think even the Pope at different times of the conflict could have tried a bit harder as well but didn’t (Female, 40s, Catholic, Belfast, Occasional churchgoer).

4.6 Churches and Peacebuilding

Although the focus of this section thus far has been on perceptions of the role of the churches during the Troubles in terms of the conflict, there was also limited praise for the churches with regards to peace-building activities. A small number of interviewees, and predominantly regular churchgoers, were keen to stress the positive role which grass-roots faith based peace-building initiatives had during the Troubles:

I would like to acknowledge, there have always been clergy and there have always been churches and people from the Christian tradition trying to work across the communities. I mean, Corrymeela for example, it actually predates the start of the conflict, it was formed in 1965. At the start of the whole bubbling of civil rights and would have been probably influential at some of the early civil rights stuff, but when the conflict actually erupted, Corrymeela as a community was already in existence. The likes of the Corrymeelases of the world and people who were engaged with Corrymeela whether as clergy or as lay people who at that time were doing unbelievable stuff you know, they were the ones crossing the barricades (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Churchgoer).

At times, the role of the Clonard Fitzroy Fellowship, the Hard Gospel project in the Church of Ireland and Clonard’s Unity Pilgrims initiative among others were discussed as positive

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76 Clonard Fitzroy Fellowship began in 1981 as an inter-church Bible study group set up by the late Father Christopher McCarthy of Clonard Monastery and Reverend Ken Newell, Minister at Fitzroy Presbyterian Church. The aim of the Clonard/Fitzroy Fellowship is to ‘promote contact, mutual understanding, respect and common witness between people from the various Christian traditions in Northern Ireland’.
examples of the churches engaging in peace-building. Despite this, the prevalent view was that particular individuals rather than the churches as institutions deserved most of the credit with regards to peace-building.

One of the difficulties in assessing the role of the churches in peace-building is that much of the work that went on in terms of building relationships was very sensitive and has therefore not necessarily been documented. It is unlikely we will ever know the full extent of all of the work that the churches and church leaders had been involved with during the Troubles, and Brewer et al. (2011) are right when they argue that politicians tend to have been given more credit than church leaders, as their initiatives were more likely to become public knowledge.

However, certain church contacts have been made public knowledge such as those made between the late Raymond Smallwoods of the UDA,79 Father Gerry Reynolds from Clonard Monastery and Reverend Ken Newell of Fitzroy Presbyterian church (Wood 2006: 188). Indeed, Clonard was home to many behind the scenes discussions in the early days of the peace process, and most notably housed a number of meetings between John Hume and Gerry Adams prior to their first consultations being made public in 1988. Other notable individuals involved in engaging with paramilitaries include the non-subscribing Presbyterian Minister Chris Hudson, Reverend Roy Magee, Reverend Gary Mason of East Belfast Mission and then Archbishop (and now Lord) Robin Eames, all of whom held crucial discussions with loyalist paramilitaries in the lead up to the ceasefires. At the same time as the Redemptorist priest Father Alec Reid was engaged in peace discussions, former priest Denis Bradley acted as the go between in discussions with the IRA and British government in Derry Londonderry. Indeed there are numerous other examples of individual church leaders playing an important role in the lead up to the ceasefires and beyond which are too numerous to be fully documented here:80

At times a small number of interviewees discussed these back-channel discussions as being significant, and two interviewees were of the opinion that having a religious leader publicly verify the decommissioning of arms was very important given that ‘men of the cloth’ could be trusted by members of both communities:

*You know, people believe that if these religious people witnesses these groups dumping their guns, then that must be the case. If Joe Bloggs down the street had have went with the organisation as they are handing all their gear in, ‘Aye, dead on!’* (Female, 30s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

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77 Which began in 2005 and has now ended.
78 Which supports Catholic parishioners in visiting Protestant churches for worship and vice versa.
79 Who was killed by the IRA on the 11th July 1994.
Summary

Broadly speaking the majority of interviewees, including regular churchgoers and some members of the clergy, believed that the main Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church ‘could have done more’ during the Troubles to try and stop the violence. Praise for faith-led peace-building initiatives tended to focus on individuals or specific projects such as the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI), which operated independently from the main churches, although the Clonard Fitzroy Fellowship, Hard Gospel project and Unity Pilgrims initiatives were all welcomed as examples of individual churches engaging positively in peace-building and promoting cross-community engagement. There was an acknowledgment that there was much behind the scenes work, which the churches were likely to have been involved in, which will never be known about given its sensitive nature.

There was a general view that some church leaders who would have liked to have acted more in relation to reaching across the divide during the conflict were hindered in relation to the power of their congregation, and this was felt to have been particularly problematic for Presbyterian leaders, although this did not stop Reverend David Latimer from addressing the Sinn Féin Ard Fhéis in Belfast in 2011. There was some debate over whether the churches merely played a relatively benign and passive role as helpless victims once the violence began, or whether or not the churches had played a more active role in maintaining the communal divide. Criticism of the churches from some tended to focus on the use of pulpits to make political speeches or on the tendency to administer to the needs of their own flock and at times ‘stay silent’ when violence impacted upon the ‘Other’ community.

There were vastly differing perceptions amongst most Protestant interviewees regardless of whether or not they attended church regularly when comparing the role of the Protestant denominations to that of the Catholic Church during the Troubles. While there was a general perception that the Protestant working-class were ‘abandoned’ by the middle-class Protestant denominations, there was an added association that the more socially inclusive Catholic Church quite openly associated with and supported, or at least sympathised with, the cause of violent Irish republicanism. Republican and Catholic interviewees disagreed with this analysis and highlighted issues relating to the display of flags in churches during republican funerals as evidence that there was much more tension between the movement and the Catholic Church than their Protestant counterparts suggested. Several Catholic interviewees suggested that these differing perceptions may in part be based upon a different theology of the funeral rite.

For some Catholic interviewees, the strength in unity of the Protestant denominations came either in the firmer stances being taken by their leaders such as Ian Paisley or rather in their relationship with the British state which acted as their ‘guarantor’. While not an exact mirror image, nevertheless the perception amongst interviewees from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds that the ‘Other’ community were better supported and more strongly
led by ‘their’ Church was an interesting one which was relatively prevalent throughout the research.

The following section assesses the role of the churches in ongoing issues which some individuals felt impacted upon community relations in contemporary Northern Ireland.
5. The Churches and Contemporary Northern Ireland

The following section assesses perceptions of the role of the churches in contemporary issues which arguably do little to challenge the permanency of the sectarian divide. The specific focus is on the role of the churches in the education system and in terms of displaying political symbolism.

5.1 The Churches and Education

Perhaps one of the most important functions of the churches since the creation of Northern Ireland has been their role in the education system. While there is not the space in this report to go into detail about the significance of the *de facto* segregated schooling system which exists, it has been argued that the fact that Protestant children predominantly attend school in the Controlled sector (at which Protestant churches often have trustee governorship) and Catholic children predominantly attend schools in the Maintained sector is what matters – this view holds that regardless of similarities in what is taught in the schools, segregated schooling initiates children into the conflict by emphasising and validating group differences and hostilities, and encouraging mutual ignorance and, perhaps more importantly, mutual suspicion (Murray 1985).

The fact therefore that the churches were integral parts of an education system which predominantly serviced their ‘own’ community was referred to several times as making the churches an ongoing part of the problem in relation to the sectarian divide. This was an issue which concerned a number of interviewees in relation to young people today growing up with limited opportunities for contact with young people from the ‘Other’ community:

...it’s not that we are in school being told to hate the Protestants, it’s never said directly. But once you realise and you take a step back, it’s there. The very fact you don’t meet people on a day to day basis. That it is a novelty factor or token factor to go meet a Protestant. It’s very much a subtle and implicit divide, but it’s very damaging for people in that it’s always going to be there in their lives because you don’t grow up in those circles, your social circles are very different (Male, 20s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

While there was general agreement amongst a number of Protestant and Catholic interviewees that a predominantly segregated education system contributed to sustaining the community divide in Northern Ireland, there were some interesting divergences of opinion on the difference between the Controlled and Maintained sectors. For two Protestants, a focus on the more insidious religious ethos of Catholic schools meant that Catholic school children not only received more religious instruction in school, but were

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81 Only approximately 6-7% of young people attend integrated schools at which both Protestant and Catholic young people attend (Bell et al. 2010).
more likely to be educated about their own community’s history than Protestant children were:

*I personally believe and I know to be correct that the unionist people are not in schools doing history the way the Roman Catholic schools do. If you ask some of the kids they can tell you all about how oppressed and how different things happened and the IRA are nearly martyrs. They see their own side, but our young people on the unionist side definitely don’t know again the history of what went on in the last 30 years. My own grandchildren don’t know* (Female, 60s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

This theme was referred to by another interviewee:

*But I also think that somewhere along the line I had that old Protestant sense of Catholic schools as ‘propaganda machines’…I don’t think I was ever explicitly told that by my parents…and I didn’t carry that view in any significant fashion, but there was some sense that Catholic schools were about being Catholic while our schools were a bit broader than that* (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

On reflection however he felt that this view that he had when he was younger that Protestant schools were more inclusive was perhaps not the case:

*But looking back, like our school had a Union Flag and an Ulster Flag in the Assembly Hall behind the stage. It took me a long time, it must have been my late teens to realise that Catholic schools obviously did have a Catholic ethos, but our schools had a Protestant, or rather a British ethos…* (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

These perceptions should not be overemphasised as they were only discussed by a very small number of individuals. Rather, the main focus of those who discussed the role of the church in education was a disappointment linked to a perception that the main churches were satisfied with the status quo. One younger interviewee, who was a former teacher, highlighted her frustration with the education system:

*…I was told by a Catholic principal whenever I graduated that I wouldn’t get any work in his school because I was Protestant. So even the teachers are divided…but I don’t think churches should have a role really. I mean I am a devout Christian person. But RE in school didn’t help me with that. It wasn’t like I got loads of teaching in school which made me a better Christian. I don’t think that has impacted me at all* (Female, 20s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

The debate as to what role the churches should have in the education system was one which was considered at length by a number of interviewees. Opinions were divided between those such as the above interviewee who felt the churches should have a limited role, to others who felt that the delivery of a Christian ethos was important for children as they grow and develop. At times some interviewees also believed that the focus on the
church role in the education system was often focused explicitly on the Catholic Church, as Protestant churches are more inclined to engage with young people through various youth organisations. As such any change in the churches’ role in education would impact disproportionately on the Catholic Church as their youth sector outside the school setting was perceived to be less well developed than that of the Protestant denominations.

It remained important for a number of younger Catholic interviewees to send their children to Maintained primary schools. The reasons for this usually involved the focus on pastoral care and the Catholic ethos which prepared young people for receiving the Sacraments. The receiving of the Sacraments still appeared to be an important ritual for even non-churchgoing Catholics. Although several Catholic interviewees argued in favour of integrated education, they tended to qualify this with the provision that it be integrated post-primary education. While sending his children to the local Maintained primary school in this regard was important for one interviewee, nevertheless he was very critical of how his local parish approached Confirmation for young people:

*And in my home parish at the minute, the kids, and this is the Catholic Church’s fault, they deliberately make the kids who attend the local integrated school make their Sacraments on another day from the rest of the parish, so they totally differentiate them. Which is awful and terrible. They are still Catholic, but because they are not attending the Catholic school and supporting the Catholic schooling system, they single them out and treat them differently* (Male, 30s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

While this was one of the more localised and direct examples given of a church proactively playing a more negative role in terms of the education sector, interviewees generally focused on what they perceived to be the passivity of the churches in terms of maintaining the differing school sectors which were primarily geared to teach young people from their ‘own’ community.

### 5.2 The Churches and political symbolism

The research did not explicitly focus on the display of flags and emblems within churches but it was an issue which was raised on occasion as indicative of the close link which remained in Northern Ireland between religion and politics in the post-conflict period. Indeed, as part of the research ICR staff attended a number of church services to assess the nature of the relationship between the religious and the political. This included the Relief of Derry commemorations in July 2010 in St. Columb’s Church of Ireland parish which housed a number of Union flags and a plaque commemorating a parishioner killed by the IRA during the Troubles. Similarly, attendance at Mass in St. Peter’s in August 2010 in Lurgan was on the same day as an Irish National Foresters parade, and the colour party stood at attention at the front of the church near the pulpit with the four provincial flags of Ireland and the Tricolour on display throughout the duration of Mass. Again, while the sermon was lacking in political rhetoric, clearly this political symbolism in and of itself is significant.
A number of Protestant interviewees recalled that while this presence of flags within particular churches was not a new phenomenon, during the Troubles they would not necessarily have viewed it as a political act:

*Things like the BB, you would have the flags coming into the church. And Remembrance Sunday and the flags as well. We would have saluted the Union flag in BB, that sort of stuff. And Remembrance Sunday usually a trumpeter came up from the Irish Rangers or something like that and bugled. I suppose (at the time) I didn’t see that stuff as political, I saw it as part of the culture* (Male, 50s, Protestant, Lurgan, Churchgoer).

While there were mixed views as to whether or not flags should be on display in churches depending on the circumstances in which the flag was flown (whether all year round or for more specific commemorations), a Presbyterian Minister was of the view that the presence of flags within the church undoubtedly made a political statement with regards to the relationship between the church and the state, while his Methodist counterpart recalled attending a church service in which the Union flag was prominently displayed:

*I think of a church up country once where I went to. I was attending a funeral and I was in the congregation and I was fascinated by the prominence of the Union Flag and someone in that congregation said to me ‘You would never put a cross in this church but try to take out the Union flag and you’ll know where you were’. I thought that said something very significant.*

Of course the display of flags and emblems in Protestant churches in particular is often linked to commemorations during the marching season. This led to some consideration of the nature of the relationship between the churches and the Loyal Orders:

*...and churches aren’t helpful in it because you know churches, you go to a Protestant church and the Union flags are flying when the BB come up and they’ve got Orange parades and there’s this real confusion in the mind of young people - what is church and how is it connected to the British state? And I do think there’s a real issue in there for churches to begin to see themselves as acultural you know beyond culture in that sense, counter-culture maybe. And I don’t think the churches are there* (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Churchgoer).

One interviewee, after reassessing his view on the infusion of politics with the religious nature of the Orange Order, decided to leave the organisation as he felt he could no longer justify his membership on purely religious grounds:

*...I was in the Orange Order for a lot of years and every Sunday before the Church you went to the Twelfth as the lodge went and the flags all came in and all that. I would now struggle going to a church that would do that because...I think it starts to bring, to merge (politics and religion) (Male, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Occasional churchgoer).*
While Earl Storey (2002) has categorised the relationship between the Loyal Orders and the Church of Ireland specifically as one of ‘progressive disengagement’, Liz Fawcett (2000) highlighted the ongoing link between various Protestant denominations and the Loyal Orders. Fawcett found that 72% of Ministers preached at Loyal Order related services on an ‘occasional basis’ (Fawcett 2000: 105). The visibility of the link between the Protestant denominations and the Loyal Orders was perhaps best (or worst) exemplified in relation to the Drumcree dispute. For one interviewee the dispute was very damaging to the image of the Church of Ireland given that the church grounds had been used by Orangemen and their supporters to hold their protest:

*Again if you look back at Drumcree and you think of the debate about how Drumcree Church itself and the graveyard was allowed to be used by the Orangemen...and that obviously is, being such a strong symbol...a microcosm of the conflict, that association of the church with that conflict I think did a lot of damage* (Male, 30s, Protestant, Armagh, Occasional Churchgoer).

While agreeing that Drumcree did do damage to the church, a Church of Ireland Minister noted the difficulties which were faced by the General Synod at the time:

*We all went out of our way to try and urge the Orangemen to realise that they were now moving into a period where they were representing much more than the sanctity of a march down a road...So yes, it was a trying period. I again was torn between what I believed was the role of the church because the parish church at Drumcree had been dragged into a situation which of course was completely political, and I thought that the most important thing for me was to maintain the fact that the church was open to everyone. But we condemned, and I came under bitter fire, for condemning their actions. But I had also the legal advice that I couldn’t do anything about it.*

Reflecting on the role of the churches in the culture of parading, a Methodist Minister contended:

*...you cannot ask people in their thousands to march behind those drums which are saying that you’re doing this in the name of ‘God and Ulster’ and then stand back and say ‘It’s not really a religious conflict’. You can’t do that. Anymore than you could parallels on the nationalist/Catholic side, of course not. So, we have again contributed knowingly, unknowingly, consciously, unconsciously, overtly or covertly we have been in there in this problem (the churches)...how we have marched behind banners that have said that ‘this is protecting our faith’ and all the rest of it.*

As part of the research, ICR staff attended a number of parades including the Twelfth in Belfast in 2010 and 2011, the 13th July ‘Sham Fight’ in Scarva in 2010 and the Apprentice Boys’ parade on the last Saturday in August in 2010. Attendance at these events was an
opportunity to assess the religious connotations of such events and briefly speak with some of those in attendance about why they had decided to attend the parade. Clearly for the majority of those in attendance as spectators at these particular parades the religious symbolism did not appear to be the main draw, rather the parades were a day out with family and friends and part of the rather nebulous concept of ‘our culture’ – these were the main reasons cited as why people attended, and the trade of local stalls selling ‘kitsch’ such as scarves, loyalist CDs and key-rings, the drinking of alcohol and use of amusement rides would suggest that most in attendance were not there to reaffirm their belief and commitment to the Almighty. While it may be a cliché to suggest that cultural reasons were motivating factors to don ‘the sash my father wore’, for several Protestant interviewees it was this familial and social context which was more important than overt religious adherence:

...my dad goes to the Twelfth and parades on the Twelfth because his dad did. And his dad did. And he passed away, so there’s that continuity and family connection... My brother is in it culturally, that type of Protestantism. Also in memory of my grandfather, wanting to kind of step into his shoes. Not necessarily the Christian aspect I wouldn’t say, but that cultural Protestantism, maybe afraid that it would die away in a few years...it’s (the parade) where you meet your family and your neighbours you haven’t seen. My cousin talks about ‘see you at Scarva’, that kind of banter. A lot of people would go who don’t care about Orangeism or about being a Protestant because it’s like a festival you know? Usually it’s just a lovely day (Female, 20s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

A Presbyterian key informant similarly focused on the cultural and political focus, rather than the religious orientation of the Orange Order, as being significant for him:

My argument is that the Orange Order has several facets. One of it is faith. One of it is political. And one is social. They are the three pillars of the Institution for me, and people will join for those three different reasons, but they will subscribe to all three. I am often quite straight about this. I’m happy it’s a Protestant organisation and I belong to a fraternity of Protestants, but I don’t join for my religion or my faith – I belong to a church for those things...personally I am probably in it more for political reasons. I see it as a strong unionist body to keep unionism together with all strands of unionism involved in it.

However there are clearly other individuals who would argue that they have joined a Loyal Order specifically on account of their religious belief, even those who suggest the events are more cultural or social than religious. This that does not mean that religion does not play a role in these commemorations; indeed there was a clear link for those spoken to at parades in terms of celebrating ‘our’ culture and what it means to be British and a Protestant, even if the latter was primarily based upon a sense of community rather than overt religious attachment. Speeches made in the field clearly linked the defence of Protestantism historically with the need to maintain the Union, echoing the role of the Grand Orange
Lodge in December 1910 when it wrote to every lodge in Ireland to encourage members to oppose Home Rule, by military means if necessary (Liechty and Clegg 2001).

The religious symbolism of loyalty to the Bible and Crown, of banners of Martin Luther and other Protestant martyrs such as Ridley and Latimer were not cited as major attractions, but the religious liturgy of the events including hymns, prayers and confessions of loyalty to faith and the Crown clearly further intertwine a political allegiance with a religious identity as the religious banners fluttered side by side with Union and Northern Ireland flags. The events publicly (re)affirm Protestantism and Britishness, and the importance of the one to the other.

While often Irish republicans assert that theirs is a left-wing and secularist ideology, similarly the reciting of the Rosary at the beginning of an Easter commemoration or the carrying of banners at Ancient Order of Hibernians and Irish National Foresters parades depicting the Virgin Mary, various deceased bishops, and the Pope amidst banners proclaiming ‘For God and Ireland’ also indicate an infusion of political and religious symbolism which reasserts a link between Catholicism and Irishness, which although more subtle perhaps than their Protestant counterparts, exists nonetheless.

Although not a primary focus of the research, it would be difficult to consider a project on religion, politics and security which did not touch upon the role of these parades and commemorations, particularly give the propensity of parades in an Irish context to increase tensions between communities. Some Protestant interviewees, even if they were not involved with the Loyal Orders, could genuinely not understand why protests at parades occur. At times these protests were felt to be an attack on Protestant ‘culture’, even for non-church goers and those who don’t take part.

This view of the parades as cultural and solemn occasions was in stark contrast to the views of some Catholic interviewees who commented that their opposition to Orange parades was political rather than religious or cultural. This tended to be based upon the view that marches in contentious areas were an exercise in ‘coat-trailing’ by what one person referred to as a ‘non-Christian’ organisation. For one interviewee in Derry Londonderry from a Protestant background, parades in the city in the late 1980s and early 1990s had indeed become very triumphalist as he believed that the marchers were making a statement on one of the few occasions when Protestants were ‘allowed’ in any great numbers to congregate on the Cityside.

Clearly there were very differing frameworks for understanding why parades and protests take place amongst some Catholic and Protestant participants, although perhaps more positively it should be noted that only a small number of individuals discussed issues relating to parades disputes at all.
It was interesting that discussion relating to Protestantism and Orangeism was generally kept to a minimum and no interviewee mentioned any issues they had in relation to the oath required to become an Orangeman, given the general view that it can be interpreted as ‘anti-Catholic’ (although some Orangemen will argue that this opposition is to the ‘Church of Rome’ and is based upon theology as the oath also requires them to ‘abstain from all uncharitable words, actions or sentiments towards his Roman Catholic brethren’). It is interesting however how the latter statement sits with the debate which occurred within the Grand Lodge on whether or not they would discipline former UUP leader Tom Elliott and party colleague Danny Kennedy after they attended Requiem Mass for Constable Kerr.

One issue which was raised by four Catholic interviewees related to what they perceived to be the relationship between the British state and loyalist paramilitaries which also tied into a perception that some fringe elements within Orangeism had at times flirted with loyalist paramilitarism. If a number of Protestant interviewees in section four viewed the Catholic Church and armed republicanism as having a ‘cosy’ relationship, a similarly small number of Catholic interviewees saw a close connection between elements within Orangeism and paramilitary loyalism. These perceptions have in all likelihood been fed by the ambiguity, or what the late UDA activist Sammy Duddy referred to as an ‘ambivalent relationship’ between the Loyal Orders and paramilitary members. The sight of the LVF chief Billy Wright in the summer of 1996, standing on the hill at Drumcree, or former UFF leader Jonny Adair and other high profile loyalist paramilitaries at the dispute in the year 2000 are likely to have done little to challenge these views. Therefore, whether it be it at the funeral of north Belfast UVF leader John Bingham in 1986 whose Orange sash sat atop the coffin, the presence of paramilitary members at Loyal Order events or more contemporary disputes related to the annual parade commemorating UVF man Brian Robinson, who was also a member of Old Boyne Island Heroes LOL 633, these very visible incidents can indicate a closeness in relationship which some Protestant interviewees also perceived in terms of priests conducting IRA funerals. That these quite visible incidents relating to both the Orange Order and the Catholic Church are the exception rather than the norm does little to deter those willing to judge the ‘Other’ community en masse, based upon the ‘worst actions’ of a minority.

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82 For the full qualification of an Orangeman, see Liechty and Clegg (2001: 153).
83 See the BBC news story, ‘Orange Order Action over UUP attendance at Kerr funeral’. Published 14th September 2011. Accessed September 25th 2011. Available online at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-14920403 . Although it should also be noted that it was the members of one Orange lodge only which made the initial complaint.
84 These at times complex relationships between cultural and religious organisations and elements within paramilitarism have also to a lesser extent become an issue for the Ancient Order of Hibernians recently in relation to Gerry McGeough the former IRA prisoner. Duddy asserted that the relationship the UDA had with the Orange Order varied from times when they ‘would let us store our gear in their halls’ to on other occasions when they were ‘shopped to the police’ (Wood 2006: 203).
Summary

For a number of interviewees the churches were not merely passive agents with regards to sectarianism and division in Northern Ireland, rather they play an active role as part of the ‘sectarian system’, helping maintain the community divide (Liechty and Clegg 2001). This role was perceived to be most prominent with regards to the education system and the stance of some churches with regards to political symbolism.

Opinions varied between those who felt that the churches should not have a role in the education system, to those who felt that a grounding in a ‘Christian ethos’ was beneficial for young people as they develop. While some interviewees tended to focus on the role of the Catholic Church in the Maintained sector, others noted that any change in the provisions for education would disproportionately impact upon the Catholic Church as Protestant denominations had a more coherent youth sector and Sunday school system operating outside of the school environment. For some younger Catholic parents, sending their children to Maintained primary school was an important preparation for receiving the Sacraments.

The majority of interviewees were of the opinion that the flying of flags at church buildings mixed religion and politics, although the context in which a flag was flown was deemed to be very important. Interviewees tended to be more in favour of short-term displays within churches which were linked to commemorations as opposed to those churches which permanently display a flag from their building throughout the year. In relation to parades, there were converging views as to why parades take place, and social and cultural ‘Protestantism’ alongside religious reasons were cited as major factors in joining one of the Loyal Orders.

While in section four some Protestant interviewees viewed the Catholic Church, community and armed republicanism as a monolith similarly a small number of Catholic interviewees believed there were links between Orangeism and the loyalist paramilitaries, even if these perceptions were only based upon the very public appearance of a priest at a funeral or a loyalist paramilitary figure in a sash.

The following section looks more broadly at the current physical security context and assesses the impact of the Agreement in allaying security fears, as well as looking at whether or not religious beliefs influence perceptions of security in the contemporary period.
6. The Security Context

The context within which the research was taking place was one of relative political stability, with the first consecutive terms of the Northern Ireland Assembly being reconvened during the course of the project. While some analysts have recently claimed that the activities of dissident republicans are on the increase, and in April 2011 Constable Ronan Kerr was killed in Omagh, the twelve months between April 2010 and April 2011 saw the equal lowest number of security related deaths recorded in a single year since police records began in 1969 (PSNI 2011b). Placed into the context of the almost 4,000 people killed as a result of the conflict since 1968 with deaths at their highest levels in 1972, levels of political violence resulting in death and serious injury are presently very low (McKittrick et al. 1999). Nevertheless, there remained throughout 2010-2011 a steady level of paramilitary activity, with a marked increase in the number of bombing incidents from 50 recorded in 2009/10 to 99 in 2010/11.

The particular focus of the security related questions during the research was to assess specifically if individuals felt that the security situation had improved since the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 and subsequently the Agreement in 1998, how and to what degree, and what challenges remained. For our purposes, any possible role of religious beliefs in influencing individual and communal attitudes towards security related issues was also assessed.

6.1 Impact of the Agreement

In relation to attitudes towards security, the general consensus was that physical security at the macro-level had improved as there were fewer violent incidents in terms of shootings and bombings. In this context the Agreement was generally welcomed as providing a framework in which differences could be resolved politically rather than violently. For several individuals, from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, the fact that their children led much freer, independent lives than they did was a visible sign of the progress and a direct impact of the Agreement:

*The other big progress in terms of security I think is that we’ve demilitarised it. So that’s a major change for me. My son who’s 16, I said to him about the difference when I was 16, in*

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87 Alongside 2007/2008 the lowest year for security related deaths since the Troubles began.

88 Additionally, while the PSNI recorded 1,437 sectarian incidents in 2010/2011, this was a decrease of 21.9% from the previous year (a decrease of 403 incidents) (PSNI 2011a).

89 This is the highest number recorded in eight years, although it remains significantly lower than the 2001/02 figure in which there were 318 bombing incidents (PSNI 2011b). In 2010/11, a total of 188 persons were arrested under section 41 of the Terrorism Act with 40 subsequently charged.
terms of the atmosphere of coming into Belfast, having to be searched, going through the barriers, army vehicles all over the place. He’s sitting in his kerbside café drinking coffee, you could be in any European city centre in that sense (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Churchgoer).

For many interviewees young people growing up now had more opportunities to interact with others as a result of the peace agreement:

You would be just more willing like to go to another area, you know, than what you would have been. I would see a big difference there in people. People are starting to mix a bit more and I even see it as far as the youth work I am involved in. I think a number of years back it would have been unheard of like in a sense for different groups to go together and say have a residential. I had one there about a month or two ago, we had four groups there, two Catholic groups and two Protestant groups and the issue of religion never came up once. It was a really positive thing (Male, 40s, Catholic, Derry/Londonderry, Churchgoer).

Indeed, both church going and non-churchgoing younger interviewees believed that they lived with fewer restrictions on their freedom of movement than their parents’ generation did. They were more inclined to feel that the increased levels of mixing of young people in university, the workplace and the increasingly neutral nightlife of Belfast city centre meant that they had fewer concerns than their older counterparts about travelling into certain areas, and they had more opportunities to develop relationships ‘across the divide’:

With my work I would freely travel in and out of west Belfast with no bother whatsoever, their (family) experiences were very different. And even my parents who would be in their early 60s, I would tell them how freely I travel across the Province and they would go ‘Oh is it safe to go on the Springfield Road at 7 o’clock on a Tuesday night?’ – so it’s very different. They lived in Belfast during the late 1960s and early 1970s and didn’t go out to pubs at all (Female, 30s, Protestant, West of the Bann, Occasional churchgoer).

…my family came from this area, I don’t think I maybe even spoke to Protestant people until I was about 15. It’s not because my mum kept us from doing it. It’s because we lived there, we went to school there and socialised there (in a Catholic area). So it wasn’t that... And when you think now that we have all moved on and all got husbands, friends, every single one of us is either in a mixed marriage or has completely and utterly mixed friends. My mum had Protestant friends but she couldn’t socialise with them because of where they lived. I think we’re getting out of that which has helped (Female, 30s, Catholic, Belfast, Occasional churchgoer).

This tendency for some younger interviewees in their 20s and 30s to see the security situation as more improved than their older counterparts requires an immediate qualification – this study included a small sample of younger interviewees and none of them were under the age of 18. Other research which is being conducted by ICR on behalf of the
Community Relations Council would suggest that while freedom of movement has improved for some teenagers, many young people living in interface areas still face particular difficulties with regards to travelling to certain areas and accessing certain facilities, particularly while wearing school uniform (Bell Forthcoming). Additionally it should be noted that there are more interface barriers now than there were in the pre-ceasefire period (BIP 2012). That said, within the confines of this study it is interesting that younger interviewees tended to be slightly more optimistic and regarded some of these barriers as more porous than did some of their older counterparts.

Despite the perceived progress generally with regards to freedom of movement, a note of caution was sounded by several individuals who discussed ongoing sectarianism and segregation as something that the Agreement hadn’t effectively challenged. As such, ongoing interface violence was not viewed as surprising given what several interviewees perceived to be the negative impact of the Agreement itself in terms of institutionalising division:

...It was a fudge that allowed us to move forward...in fact it institutionalised division, and the public response to that is that segregation in society has increased. Year on year as far as I know we have seen increased segregation in housing patterns. In that context I say the security situation has deteriorated. Yes, we have got rid of the army off the streets, yes the police have been much more demilitarised, yes we have got the PSNI instead of the RUC, but the security situation has deteriorated all the time and it is only now that we are beginning to see the manifestation of that coming through in terms of the violence emerging on the streets (Male, 50s, Other faith, Belfast, Churchgoer).

The 2011 consultation on the draft Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) policy document and legislation regarding parading also came in for criticism by some interviewees, both Catholic and Protestant, who work in the community and voluntary sector. In these instances there was a perception that the CSI document shied away from trying to overcome division and was predicated on institutionalising oppositional identities of Protestant/British and Catholic/Irish. Two interviewees particularly criticised the parading legislation as moving towards ‘ghettoising’. The interviewee referred to previously continued:

...the CSI is creating the potential for institutionalised division. So within that it describes parades being acceptable in one’s ‘own’ areas, but basically saying that we have to deal with the parades that are in shared spaces and make sure that they are acceptable, in other words a loyalist parade in the Shankill can do whatever it wants. Now the result of that is you are going to ghettoise...if you are fixed in your identity, and if your constituency is saying that identity must be protected at all costs against the ‘other’ you are forced into that groove, it’s like ploughing, you just plough deeper and deeper into that groove. So the machinery is increasing in terms of the institutionalisation of it. And the current (Office of)
First Minister and Deputy First Minister, massive machinery to create this division and perpetuate it (Male, 50s, Other faith, Belfast, Churchgoer).

In other words, for a small number of interviewees the very machinations of government established under the Agreement, while reducing levels of violence in the short-term, posed a perennial threat to security as they further entrenched division between communities. In this regard, if one community was felt to be gaining ground at the expense of another and this threat of ‘cultural insecurity’ reached a certain level, violence may return to the streets:

I am optimistic about the future, I think we are moving in the right direction. I think the right noises are being made. I am a little bit concerned about this sharing out stuff that is happening (at a political level), because that just takes you back to where you were. And eventually at some point in time one side is going to say ‘Hold on, you are getting more than me, this isn’t equal any more’. And then you are back in to a cycle again. And I am a great believer that life is peaks and troughs and cycles in history, things happen, then it goes cool for a while and then something happens...The danger this time is if it goes too far the other way again it will be decades and we will never ever get back (to peace again) (Male, 30s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

However, not all interviewees were as critical of the Agreement, and a number of individuals, again from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, felt that there had been tangible benefits. For those in particular who viewed the political process and security situation as inextricably linked, the Agreement had led to a new political dispensation which had vastly improved the security situation on the ground when compared to the late 1980s and early 1990s:

I always said that the political and the security issue were utterly interlinked. We never had a security problem here, we had a security problem which was derived from a political problem. But because the political process seems to have moved on so much I think that has released the security aspect of it, because you have the reform of the policing service, of the justice system, which has opened the possibility of Catholics and nationalists and republicans being much more participatory in all those things. And that utterly changes what people would term the security situation (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

While the majority of individuals welcomed the fact that there were much lower levels of violence as a result of the political settlement, there were more diverging attitudes as to specific aspects of the Agreement which some individuals found difficult to accept. Although a former RUC officer welcomed the Good Friday Agreement stating that it ‘was a very positive thing’ which had transformed his relationships with members of Sinn Féin, for a small number of other Protestant interviewees, while the lower levels of shootings and bombings were welcomed, there were aspects of the Agreement they disagreed with. These tended to include police reform, decommissioning and the release of paramilitary prisoners, while for another individual it was particularly difficult to accept that ‘terrorists are now in
government’. This ambivalence towards the Agreement was reflected by the following comments:

*It has changed in many ways for the better, because you do feel a lot happier now. And we are meeting like, people are getting out and about. Like for years you wouldn’t have went to halls and halls were closed up like. People are having a social life now and they are mixing more and the communities are coming together a lot more than they did. There is more space to come together. There’s a lot. But since the Agreement there are some things I don’t agree with, like the prisoners getting out, no matter what they are, Protestant or Catholic, ‘do the crime pay the time’. I think there was too many things done to appease, you know, I wouldn’t have. But I suppose if you didn’t do it we wouldn’t have got the Agreement. But I think there was too much handed over at that stage* (Female, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

While the most critical individuals of various aspects of the Agreement were from a Protestant background, including a number of regular churchgoers who morally disagreed with issues such as prisoner release, one of the most critical interviewees of the current political dispensation was a former IRA prisoner who was concerned that sectarianism was ‘prevalent’ at Stormont in decision making which worried him with regards to long-term security considerations:

…”I don’t think the peace process has bedded in, the peace process is still in transformation, whereas everybody thinks it is now a fully functional, operational thing. Sectarianism in decisions and a lack of working together in the Assembly is very clear. I mean they can’t get agreement on some of the major issues so they can’t because of the religious/political divide up there. People on the ground are feeling a sense, people we work with, they’re not feeling any great benefit. Nobody is getting extra quid in their pocket. The state of some of the housing round here is ridiculous. Unionist politicians in these communities have failed them big time…”(Male, 40s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

He felt that all of these factors meant that there was the likelihood of a return to conflict in future:

…”my prediction for the future is that one, we have a rise in militant republicanism. That rise in militant republicanism will lead to a reaction from loyalist militants so it will. You will see the emergence of the Special Powers again you know...more detention times, arrests easier, remands easier, all that sort of stuff” (Male, 40s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

While this interviewee was one of the more pessimistic with regards to the security situation, his assertion that the economic climate was a threat to security was one repeated by many interviewees.
6.2 Economics and Security

The general consensus was that individuals living in working-class Protestant and Catholic areas had not benefitted from a peace dividend, with one interviewee sarcastically noting that ‘no amount of new shopping malls and the opening of a Brown Thomas or something in the city centre is going to resolve what the raw end of this conflict was like’. There was also a concern that work on the ground at the likes of interfaces which has helped to keep situations quiet, could also be threatened as a result of budgetary cuts:

*I think there is a lot of work to be done and people take a lot of things for granted because the interfaces are quiet now they are saying there is no need for interface workers. People just think the interfaces are quieter by chance, it hasn’t happened by chance. It has happened because of the work that people put into it. Some of the work you were doing you were out to 3, 4, 5 in the morning…*(Female, 40s, Catholic, Belfast, Churchgoer).

Continuing support for grass-roots peace-building work was still required therefore, and the grassroots situation with regards to economics and employment was perceived as a threat to security. Inevitably when the conversation turned to the economic situation, interviewees were concerned that paramilitary organisations, and particularly dissident republicans, could increase their support amongst disenfranchised young males in working-class communities who had few prospects of employment.

6.3 Security threats

The main threat to physical security was perceived to be that posed by the ongoing campaign by dissident republicans. This appeared to be particularly concerning for Protestants living in rural parts of Armagh and West of the Bann more so than in Belfast. The fact that dissidents had not actively targeted loyalists was believed to be one of the reasons as to why there was a relatively low level of violence at present. However according to several interviewees this situation could change quickly if loyalists, or Protestants more generally, were to be killed at the hands of dissidents:

*At the minute they are targeting army and the police. If they started targeting loyalists that could be a deal breaker in all ways, basically because if they walked out and say shot Jackie McDonald I know a lot of people would be wanting blood* (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Catholic interviewees, and specifically those who identified as republicans, were more dismissive of the capabilities of the dissident groupings and were therefore more optimistic with regards to the security dispensation remaining at ‘manageable levels’:

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90 The label ‘dissidents’ referring to the Continuity IRA, Real IRA or Óglaigh na hÉireann. It should be noted that there are also ‘dissident’ loyalists, although the media tend not to term them as such. See the UTV news story, *‘Real UFF blamed for school bomb’*. Published 6th September 2010. Available online at [http://www.u.tv/news/real-uff-blamed-for-school-bomb/f7e67860-03d5-4b53-b2f9-1547dac2ed24](http://www.u.tv/news/real-uff-blamed-for-school-bomb/f7e67860-03d5-4b53-b2f9-1547dac2ed24). Accessed May 28th 2012.
Now we have a crowd called RDA which is a group of disenfranchised Provos, Republican Defence Army...Sure there is only half a dozen of them. They’ll come out now and again and they will clip somebody, but they are more like bully boys that type of group (Male, 40s, Strabane, Catholic, Non-churchgoer).

However this individual was concerned that protests staged at Maghaberry prison, if they led to a death on hunger-strike, could increase levels of dissident support, again with young nationalists being particularly susceptible:91

...what is the biggest threat to security, I would have seen it as the recent protest in Maghaberry prison and they were protesting at the prison conditions, and they were protesting at the no wash one and they talked about going on a dirty protest, that is the biggest threat. That’s got more history and a sympathetic ear and once you go into that I would say that if that went on a long time that would be a thing that young people would connect with (Male, 40s, Catholic, Strabane, Non-churchgoer).

In particular there was perceived to be a negative impact in relation to a ‘romanticising of the conflict’ for young people, some of whom in the most extreme circumstances, could be recruited by paramilitaries, particularly if their sympathies were aroused by a prison protest or death on ‘active service’:

I can tell you right now, the murder that happened here, a young guy of 17, he was a troubled child and he would have came to our centre occasionally – he’s in gaol for shooting a police officer. I know other young people who are in gaol at the minute because of their sectarian beliefs. So some of these kids weren’t even born at the Good Friday Agreement, so where is that coming from? Where is that sectarianism coming from? So yes, there is a physical threat, but there is an underlying threat that is either silence or romanticising through stories and being immature adults (Male, 50s, Protestant, Lurgan, Churchgoer).

6.4 Security and Community background

A number of interviewees who were from a Protestant background, and more often than not churchgoing Protestants in rural locations, felt more secure in previous years when there was a more visible police and army presence on the ground. While a Protestant from County Armagh felt that as a result of the scaling back of police numbers and the withdrawal of the British army to barracks ‘there’s no security round here’, another in Belfast also felt

that the security situation was concerning since the scaling down of the British military presence:

*No, how has it (improved)? We’ve had police paid off, we’ve had the UDR disbanded* (Female, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Conversely, the majority of Catholic interviewees regardless of whether they were regular churchgoers or not felt more secure with a much less visible army and police presence. For Catholics particularly in the Armagh and West of the Bann regions the helicopter bases, watchtowers and military installations were viewed as intrusive forms of surveillance which interviewees welcomed the removal of. While the removal of a watchtower for the majority of Catholics indicated a process of moving towards ‘normalisation’, for a number of Protestants it signified ‘loss’ and made them feel less secure:

*…I come from a background that if I saw an army check or a police check there was a level of security there, you felt secure. Some people felt threatened. I didn’t…* (Male, 50s, Protestant, Lurgan, Occasional churchgoer).

*… the whole scaling down of military barracks and all that which are closed down, that has actually helped the peace process* (Male, 40s, Catholic, Derry Londonderry, Churchgoer).

While for a number of Catholic interviewees living near the border, the ‘watchful eye’ of the British army had decreased as a result of demilitarisation, one individual spoke about her relief that the influence of the PIRA in South Armagh had also decreased in the area as individuals at times felt under pressure to ‘do the right thing’. This was highlighted as being particularly intimidating at the time of the murder of Paul Quinn in October 2007, allegedly by members of the Provisional movement, which ‘caused a big rift in the community by people that disagreed with it and then people really felt they couldn’t speak out’.

It appeared to be the case that some of the more sceptical interviewees towards the security situation either had personal experience of the Troubles or lived in areas which were significantly impacted upon by violence.

### 6.5 Personal experience and Security

Individuals from a Protestant background living in rural and border areas, some of whom had lost family members during the conflict, were more inclined to view the dissidents as a mere extension of the PIRA and subsequently took a pessimistic view of the security situation. A churchgoing male Protestant west of the Bann felt that ‘*the Provisional IRA are still the people, they are still the quarter-masters*’, while another churchgoing female interviewee suggested that ‘*In South Armagh they were in the IRA. They are now into the dissidents. They are clever men*’. As such dissident republicans were merely employing the same tactics that many of them had used in the PIRA for many years:
... often people say, ‘bombed their way to the debating table’ and I just feel there are restless groups out there now who feel ‘we can do this too’ (Male, 40s, Protestant, Omagh, Churchgoer).

Another individual who felt that the dissidents and mainstream republicanism were one and the same added:

*It has improved a lot in one way because obviously there’s no bombs in this area now whereas in the past there was a lot of bombs in this area, and there hasn’t been any shootings recently either. But having said that there is still a lot of uncertainty, a lot of fear and suspicion about what is happening, what the agenda actually is, and everyone is well aware that the so-called dissidents are still very active...they are just waiting to see how much they can get (Sinn Féin) and once they stop getting they will resort back to violence. There is a big feeling that will happen* (Male, 40s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

Amongst interviewees with personal experience as combatants in the conflict, perceptions varied as to their feelings of security at present. A former UDR member noted that while he himself felt relatively secure, ongoing dissident activity had led to former comrades ‘back looking under their cars’. Additionally, dissident bombings of police stations in rural and isolated communities added to the sense of insecurity for some.

While republican ex-prisoners spoke of their work with loyalists and the PSNI as an indication that they felt much more comfortable than during the Troubles, an interviewee whose brother was killed by the IRA referred to receiving police reports that he was on a dissident ‘hit-list’. He referred to being more concerned for his personal safety now than he did during the conflict:

*I felt more secure, safer, when the terrorist campaign was at its height than I do today, because at that time at every moment of the day you were vigilant. And you hardly drove a road where you didn’t see an army patrol or a police patrol, they were visible which was reassuring. Today, it’s much quicker to get a pizza delivered...to this house than to get a police officer to come if you are concerned* (Male, 60s, Protestant, Magherafelt, Churchgoer).

While this interviewee was one of the more critical of the PSNI in terms of providing an effective policing service, a small number of other interviewees, both Catholic and Protestant, highlighted both the positive and negative impacts which they felt the change in policing had on the security situation.

**6.6 Policing and Security**

A number of Catholic interviewees working in the community sector believed that one of the main positives of the Agreement was the new dispensation with regards to policing and
justice and subsequently the motion passed at the January 2007 Sinn Féin Ard Fhéis to work within the new policing structures was broadly welcomed.92

In particular, younger Catholics were more inclined to have confidence in the PSNI than were some of their older counterparts:

...the RUC for a long time were on the side of the Protestants... Now the PSNI is for everyone. And people now can relate to it. There’s a lot more you know crimes reported from Catholic areas now definitely. That has been shown. And obviously there’s a lot more Catholics in the police than there has ever been (Female, 30s, Catholic, Belfast, Occasional churchgoer).

...if something is wrong, if someone gets hurt, if someone breaks in to your house, you are ringing the police. You are not ringing the boys with the bats down the street. I think that’s the kind of thing to think about. So I think it has improved (Female, 19, Catholic, Belfast, Churchgoer).

Despite this tendency amongst Catholic interviewees to view the new policing arrangements as an improvement, for some the disappearance of the Provisionals had created a policing vacuum. As such, a small number of those who lived in working-class estates referred to feeling less secure now than they did during the Troubles in relation to lower-levels of anti-social behaviour:

When we were growing up, you left your door open. Your neighbours were very friendly. People running in and out of each other’s houses... Plus we had the fear of the ‘RA. They were always the bad boys. If you did anything, you knew that the IRA, they were our, I’m going to sound like a republican here, but it was like they policed the area, they controlled it, If there was anybody stepping out of line they dealt with it. Whether they were wrong or not. Now? Fuck! Burglaries, you couldn’t leave your door open (Female, 30s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

For a number of community workers from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds there remained an issue with regards to what they perceived to be ‘two-tiered’ policing. This relates to the use of community police officers who build relationships with local communities on the one hand, while using a heavier police presence drawing upon Tactical Support Groups (TSGs) and armed officers for certain policing scenarios, including the policing of parades and associated protests. It was believed that such an approach impacted negatively upon the relationships built with the community, and in particular with those relationships developed with local young people:

...so there’s two tiered policing, these boys come in with the visors and all and are not based in Strabane, they ghost in, do a security job and fuck off and it annoys everybody in the process. And then the next day you have these community policemen cycling in saying

‘We’re community policemen, policing has changed’ (Male, 40s, Catholic, Strabane, Non-churchgoer).

It became apparent that although a small number of Protestants agreed with their Catholic counterparts that their areas were less ‘policed’ now in terms of anti-social behavioural issues than during the Troubles, their security concerns tended to focus more on levels of political violence and the threat of dissident republicans. Catholic interviewees were more inclined to prioritise concerns with these lower-levels of anti-social behaviour and were somewhat more optimistic with regards to security at the macro-level.

Indeed, the spectre of the dissident threat looms large in the minds of some members of the Protestant community more generally, and particularly those older interviewees who live in rural areas and have lived through or had personal experience of the Troubles. According to one interviewee recent acts of violence by dissident republicans, while relatively small in scale compared to previous years as the statistics at the beginning of this section suggest, nevertheless impact upon a psychological sense of security:

...The fact that people that have both psychic wounds and physical wounds from the Troubles hear of a movement again that is beginning to shoot and plant bombs, the recall of that psychologically I think probably outweighs the actual physical threat. In other words, something is invoked again, the ghosts of the past are invoked again...I have been in conversations where people literally exclaim in despair, ‘Oh no, surely we are not going there again’ (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

Summary

Clearly the Agreement at one level has provided a framework within which to resolve differences politically rather than violently. The resulting lower levels of violence at present were contrasted with the worst years of the Troubles, and there was a general perception that young people today have more opportunities to meet and interact across the divide as a result of the breathing space provided by the Agreement. Generally Catholic interviewees were more positive about the political settlement, particularly regarding the resulting movement on the policing and justice situation which they found more acceptable than in previous years.

In contrast, some Protestant interviewees and predominantly those from churchgoing backgrounds talked about aspects of the Agreement they morally disagreed with, but nevertheless were glad that levels of violence were much lower than in previous years. However, for a minority of individuals the Agreement itself is an inherent source of instability and insecurity because it entrenches and essentialises differences and notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Some interviewees were critical of the CSI and parading strategies as they

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93 For those interviewees from rural areas interviewed there was a perception that the dissidents are more ‘active’ than they are in Belfast and other towns across Northern Ireland.
did not propose to try and overcome the community divide. As such disputes over parades and other cultural events will perennially have an element of ‘insecurity’ associated with them in the zero-sum world of Northern Irish politics.

The threat posed by dissident republicans was viewed as the primary threat to domestic security, and was particularly concerning for Protestants in rural and border locations in which recent dissident activity increased the sense of threat. Even the faintest suggestions that the late Colonel Gadaffi provided dissidents with funds relatively recently are unlikely to help allay these fears, even if these allegations prove to be false.94

Catholic interviewees were less concerned with regards to dissidents and some were rather more worried about levels of anti-social behaviour, given that the Provisional IRA has left the stage. Most interviewees agreed that the economic situation was also a threat to security, firstly with regards to funding of conflict related work at interfaces and other key areas of intervention, and secondly that dissidents and other paramilitary groups could become more attractive in an environment in which there are significantly greater numbers of disenfranchised young people with few prospects of employment.

While a number of the most pessimistic with regards to the security situation in relation to political violence tended to be churchgoing Protestants, it is difficult to assert if it is their religious conviction which contributes to their feeling of insecurity. Rather, perceptions appear to be related to a multitude of factors which may include theological convictions, but are also based upon location and personal experience of the Troubles. It may be more appropriate to suggest that those individuals of theological conviction from a Protestant background were more likely to view dissidents, Sinn Féin and the broader republican movement as all encompassing, perhaps similar to constructions of the pan-nationalist front (including the Catholic Church) as a ‘leviathan’ which was relatively commonplace in unionist discourse in the 1990s and draws upon the ‘persecuted victim’ framework (Morrow 1997).

The following section assesses attitudes towards the role of religion in violence generally and compares perceptions of the rationale behind the Northern Irish conflict with acts of violence such as those perpetrated in London on 7th July 2005 and in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania on September 11th 2001.

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7. Religion, Violence and the ‘War on Terror’

The main focus of the research was on religion, identity and perceptions of security in the local context, but as part of the broader ‘Global Uncertainties’ programme, any issues which may be applicable for other areas of potentially ‘religiously’ motivated conflict, including the broader ‘War on Terror’, were to be assessed. In line with this interviewees were asked to give their thoughts on the role of religion in conflict situations generally, and then asked to compare specifically what they felt the role of religion was in the Northern Irish conflict compared to the motivations behind attacks such as 7/7 and 9/11. The section also briefly reviews perceptions of security policy and lessons which may be learnt from Northern Ireland in relation to how to deal with conflict and violence elsewhere.

This section requires an immediate qualification; the majority of interviewees were quick to point out that religion can very often be a powerful force for good and can play a very positive role in promoting peace and reconciliation as discussed at the end of section four. Thinking along these lines one can recall the quiet dignity with which Gordon Wilson drew solace from his faith after his daughter Marie was killed by the IRA in the 1987 Remembrance Day bombing, the peace-building work of the late Michael McGoldrick Senior whose son was shot by the LVF in July 1996 just three short weeks after graduating from Queens University, or that of Maura Kiely, who established the Cross group for victims after her son Gerard was gunned down by the UVF as he and a friend left Mass in 1975.

That said, while there was broad consensus that religion can play a positive role in challenging tendencies towards violence and promoting peace even under the most difficult of circumstances; can religion ever be a factor in violence?

Broadly speaking, even those who were regular church goers believed that at times religious or theological justifications can and have been used for acts of violence. The power of religion in this sense was viewed as one in which ‘our’ cause is ‘righteous’ and God is on ‘our’ side. Accordingly, religious texts can be drawn upon to justify violence under specific circumstances:

...there’s certainly plenty of parables or passages in the Bible where it is pretty clear that violence is being encouraged, if not directly ordered. And then there’s all of the Biblical stuff where it is ‘Love thy neighbour’ and ‘Turn the other cheek’. And all the rest of it...So I think religion can give negative instruction around the issue of violence, or contradictory instruction around the issue of violence. And I think certainly one of the things that religion does do, or people do through religion is to interpret it to use it very violently... Yes, religion can be a force for good, there are religious peacemakers, there have always been those people who have sought to take down the barriers via religion. But there have always been plenty of people prepared to utilise them... (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).
Another interviewee highlighted what he viewed as the religious justifications which had been used both in Northern Ireland and in the ‘War on Terror’ to justify military action:

*In terms of the mythology that can be built around all of it, it can be used as a justification and that has certainly happened here in Northern Ireland, justified by both sides. Because ‘God’s on our side we have the right’ and I think all of that language in the War on Terror, that language was used again - that sense of God is on our side therefore violence is justified* (Male, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Churchgoer).

The latter comment then poses the question - if God is on ‘our’ side, does that mean that violence is acceptable?

### 7.1 Is violence morally wrong?

Interestingly, while the vast majority of interviewees either did not or were reluctant to talk about their own attitudes to violence and whether or not it was ever morally justified, a small number of both churchgoing and non-churchgoing Protestants and Catholics talked about the ‘need’ for violence at certain times under specific circumstances. From a republican disposition, while armed struggle, according to several ex-prisoners, was ‘finished’ and could not be morally justified when the conditions no longer existed for a military campaign and there was no chance of success, former IRA/INLA members nevertheless defended the use of violence in the past as a ‘necessary evil’. It was also the case that a small number of Protestants, including churchgoers, felt that the British army and security forces were too lenient on republicans and should have ‘taken out’ the ‘key players’ for the greater good:

*My big frustration growing up was that the British didn’t put enough effort into dealing with the problem in Northern Ireland, it was always about containment rather than about wiping it out. I remember celebrating whenever we heard of SAS attacks, shoot-to-kill. I personally at that time anyway I didn’t see any problem with the shoot-to-kill policy. I mean it was widely known, everyone knew who these people were – why weren’t they being taken out when they started to do that? I felt it was justifiable, but in hindsight I think there are other ways that could have helped resolve and bring things to an end much sooner...*(Male, 40s, Protestant, Derry/Londonderry, Occasional churchgoer).

The same individual suggested that as he had got older and interacted more with those from a nationalist and republican background he could understand more where they were coming from, adding ‘personally, I have got a broader understanding of what happened and why it happened but I will never believe that killing another person was justifiable in any means’.

Generally even those who were the harshest critics of either the British army or republicans argued that, in the Northern Irish context, dialogue was necessary to resolve what was essentially a political dispute, but at times there were ambivalent attitudes among a small
number of interviewees as to the use of violence, particularly when ones ‘cultural security’, was under threat:

*I will talk and negotiate with anybody, I have no problem with that. I will go to any dissident republican in this town and talk to him about what’s going on here, happily challenge that, listen, try and understand, because I want this place to be safer for young people. But there’s another part of me which would think if they are going to do that, just pick up guns and shoot them. I would go down that military side. I mean don’t drop a nuke on anybody before negotiating but if these guys are hell bound on changing my culture and eroding what I have been brought up in, let’s get rid of them at whatever costs. So there’s two very definite sides to me. I’m not a pacifist. Although 90% of what I do would be in that pacifist role, and I see myself as a peace-builder first of all and that is why I am committed to working here. But you know, do I believe there is a time that you have to actually take up arms? Well, yes I do, very clearly. Could I do that? I’m probably too old to, but would I do it? Yeah, and I wouldn’t think twice about that* (Male, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

7.2 Religion and Violence in Northern Ireland

The general consensus was that the Northern Irish conflict was primarily a political contest over territory. A very small number of Protestants of theological conviction spoke at times of what they perceived to be the role of the Catholic Church or Catholicism as motivating factors for individual republicans, but generally even they suggested that dialogue was required in the Northern Irish context because there was a political dynamic to the violence. This view was one shared by the overwhelming majority of interviewees, where religion tended to be viewed as a convenient label for ethno-national communities:

*...I am very much against saying that the violence here was a religious conflict. I think that has been a label that people in authority, and even paramilitary groups, politicians, religious leaders have just branded the conflict religious because it makes it simple and it’s black and white, Protestant, Catholic. It makes people easy to identify, it makes communities easy to identify and it totally sweeps under the carpet all the complex social issues that were responsible for the conflict* (Female, 20s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

However, several interviewees suggested that religion played more of a role in conflict in Northern Ireland than purely acting as a label for political views, and cited the role of Ian Paisley’s religious rhetoric as highlighting the religious dynamics within the conflict which over time had increasingly become conjoined with the political:

*...but I think we’re coming through hundreds of years where religion was used. I think politicians had a lot to do to here honestly...Well, take the beginning, Paisley and the likes...I mean he created the scenario where young men were joining up (to paramilitaries). He did as much for the enrolment in Protestant paramilitaries as the hunger-strike did (for the IRA)...Certainly he did. He whipped them up...And he was marching them with red berets and*
when they got to gaol he didn’t want nothing to do with them (Female, 50s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

However, those who believed that religion played a significant role in the Northern Irish conflict were certainly in the minority and the majority of interviewees argued there were nuanced and complex reasons as to why the conflict occurred. The focus on the politics behind the Northern Irish conflict was vastly different however when compared to attitudes to the broader dynamics of the ‘War on Terror’ and associated acts of violence such as 9/11 and 7/7.

7.3 Religion, Violence and the ‘War on Terror’

In terms of similarities with the Northern Irish situation, many recalled that the ‘sights and sounds’ and the ‘horrors’ in terms of the death and destruction of the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks reminded them of what occurred locally, albeit on a much larger scale. This tended however to be where perceptions of the similarities between the attacks and the violence witnessed during the Troubles ended. The perception held by many from both Protestant and Catholic churchgoing and non-churchgoing backgrounds was that the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks were primarily motivated by religion and theology:

I could be wrong, but as far as I know and I am led to believe it is actually part of those people’s religious beliefs that Christianity is not good and they should do everything within their power to ensure that Christianity is done away with. That’s a different thing (Male, 60s, Catholic, Omagh, Non-churchgoer).

…people here were more motivated by politics rather than religion. It just so happened that you know, republicans were from the Catholic community and the loyalists were the Protestant community but I don’t think religion was what was behind it, it was more political. But whereas the difference with the 9/11 and the 7/7 bombers was it is a religious fundamentalism (Female, 50s, Protestant, Armagh, Churchgoer).

It was suggested that as a result of not primarily being religiously motivated, ‘terrorists’ in Northern Ireland were ‘less fanatical’ and adopted a differing modus operandi:

…within the extreme Muslims, very much like glorifying that that work can be done and you will be brought to Allah and you will be given all the virgins for blowing up these people…I think the Christian ethos is very important. I think when you are talking about when people think that God is going to glorify them for flying a plane into a building, that’s religion in the extreme (Female, 30s, Catholic, Belfast, Occasional churchgoer),

The issue about warnings generally being given in relation to bombs related to the Irish conflict was also discussed:

I suppose the IRA would argue and say they always gave warnings to bombs and the security forces was holding back and all that political stuff. 9/11 for me was absolutely awful. I
couldn’t believe that somebody could do that...Where they got the inner strength for to do that I don’t know. That’s why I think they are very fanatical, you know. For somebody to get on a plane knowing that they were going to crash into a building that’s going to kill thousands upon thousands of people, like what goes through your mind to do stuff like that? (Female, 40s, Catholic, Belfast, Churchgoer).

While many interviewees adopted the position that dialogue in the Northern Irish context was crucial to solving what was essentially a political and a territorial problem, dialogue was viewed as almost impossible with those who are ‘irrationally’ motivated by religion. Even those from a strong faith perspective from within the Protestant denominations in particular believed that at some stage in the Northern Irish case there had to be dialogue to resolve the situation, but it was believed to be much more difficult to negotiate with religiously motivated violence.

Despite ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ being viewed by many interviewees as the driving force behind Al-Qaeda linked attacks, several individuals believed that there were in all likelihood political motivations attached to carrying out acts of violence such as 9/11 and 7/7.95 These individuals included those mainly from a republican background who drew parallels behind the political motivations driving the Irish conflict historically and contemporary foreign policy decisions taken by both the United States and the UK particularly in regards to the situation in Israel/Palestine:

My view is that the cause of the problem is not religion, I think it would be useful to look along those lines, of what motivated the Fenians and the IRA, and a lot of them were English... And I suspect that this is the real cause of it, that you have young guys there from within that community, they know that they are part of the community, and if religion helps form their cultural attachment, fine, and it does, but they are aware of what is happening in Israel, in Afghanistan, Iraq, other incidents. Now they can maybe build their sense of oppression or injustice out of all proportions...they might be completely wrong in their perception of injustice...but it’s their perception that their fellow countrymen and community is being picked upon by someone else, and this is their means of retaliating. I think that’s the dynamic rather than religion (Male, 50s, Catholic, Armagh, Non-churchgoer).

However, another former IRA prisoner believed that there were differences between the IRA’s campaign and attacks such as 7/7:

I think it’s more of a religious ethos now in regards to 7/7. One of the most fearful things for me is when someone is willing, because of their beliefs, and again it’s a really strong religious belief, to strap on a bomb and to sit on a carriageway and to take their own life and

95 Another interviewee who believed that there were political and religious motivations behind the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks nevertheless believed ‘that fundamentalism is stronger (within Islam) than it is within Christianity’.

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as many as possible of those surrounding them, then that’s the worry (Male, 50s, Catholic, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

7.4 Security Policy

There have been a number of reports in recent years documenting the development of security policy in Northern Ireland, most recently by the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ 2008). Three key findings from the Report ‘Lessons from Northern Ireland for the War on Terror’ were, firstly, that counter-insurgency strategies were essentially counter-productive; secondly that emergency legislation tended to become the norm; and thirdly that such measures tend to undermine public confidence in the law (CAJ 2008: 16).

In particular, the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1974 which replaced the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) and Emergency Provisions Acts introduced the seven day power of arrest. However, the British government had already used legislation in August 1971 to intern hundreds of predominantly Catholic men from working-class nationalist and republican communities in Northern Ireland. CAJ found that of all those 1,981 interned just 107 were Protestant while the remaining 1,874 were Catholic, with the use of stop and search tactics also being primarily directed at the Catholic community – between 1978 and 1986 over 50,000 people were arrested, around three-quarters of whom were Catholic (CAJ 2008: 35 and 40). CAJ argue that emergency provisions reversed the principle of the ‘burden of proof’ with approximately 75% of those individuals arrested under Emergency Provisions legislation eventually being released without charge (CAJ 2008: 33).

Reflecting upon the debate in the UK more generally in recent years relating to the Terrorism Act of 2006 which raised to 28 days the power of detention (with the government arguing for 90 days)96 (CAJ 2008: 17), several interviewees from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds referred to the impact which security policy can have on raising the potential for conflict by alienating sections of the population. Specifically, some from the Catholic community spoke of the impact which they felt various security policies had in terms of the security situation during the Troubles:

If you speak to people locally they’ll tell about the army harassing the children going to school, making them empty their schoolbags, calling them names. That all fuels hatred and that was a big, rather foolish move I think that caused a lot of conflict and the way people were arrested too (Female, 40s, Catholic, Armagh, Churchgoer).

96 The UK government strategy for countering ‘international terrorism’ is CONTEST which was updated in July 2011. The strategy is based upon the principles of Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare. The second strand, prevent is ‘to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism’ and was developed in 2007. However after reading the document there appears to be little mention of grievances with regards to foreign policy, rather the focus appears to be on the perceived role of a ‘persuasive ideology’ which uses an ‘interpretation of religion, history and politics to legitimate terrorism’ (Home Office 2011).
You feel more comfortable now that you’re not going to be harassed and stopped and whatever. The unfortunate thing was here if you had a name that was synonymous with whatever and you were stopped and you happened to have the same surname, tough, you’d have to sit there an hour, prove that you weren’t related to Mickey Murphy or whoever it was...That type of policing built up resentment especially in younger people (Female, 50s, Catholic, Armagh, Non-churchgoer).

Another interviewee argued that this perceived ‘harassment’, or at the very least differential treatment for one section of the community, undoubtedly alienates individuals from the security forces:

...the number of times you would hear about checkpoints, people coming home from GAA matches, going to dances and they were stopped and messed about, messed about by, usually it was the UDR. They weren’t necessarily shot or beaten up, but they were maybe held for half an hour coming back from a GAA match, got out of the car on a wet morning until they searched the back of the car and nothing was found. But it created that sense that people felt that at the end of the day that if a UDR man was shot, ‘Well they are asking for it’. There are different reasons for it and I am not going to go into them, and clearly shooting someone dead for searching a car if that was all is involved is totally disproportionate, but it still doesn’t matter if people think that, you are lowering their resistance (Male, 50s, Catholic, Armagh, Non-churchgoer).

The potentially negative impact that the introduction of similar powers which have been used in Northern Ireland, into the rest of the UK, such as stop and search specifically targeted towards members of the Muslim community, was discussed on a number of occasions:

...one of the debates that is going on is do you address Islamic fundamentalism by security measures or when you try to address it by security measures do you reduce or disenfranchise the young men who move towards the extreme? And in a funny sense we did have that argument here – if you go in and do Internment and all, do you change civil rights people into armed forced republicans? So in that sense those arguments, those tendencies are still there (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

At times some interviewees were concerned that the British government were repeating the ‘same mistakes’ that they made in Northern Ireland with regards to alienating a significant section of the population, particularly in relation to the power of detention:

I saw real parallels and real concerns with the whole notion of ‘War on Terror’ in seeing how a sense of a war on terrorism here didn’t work and how a whole sense of Internment, for example here, didn’t work in terms of solving the problems of terrorism in Northern Ireland. And the Act in which they were going to increase the number of days that suspected terrorists were held, as a response to the 7/7 attacks... the whole 45 day thing...which for me
was a kind of have you not learned from Northern Ireland? To intern people as suspected terrorists actually creates more terrorists than dealing with the problem. So that was a very striking response to it (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Occasional churchgoer).

More than one person recalled the conditions facing Irish people travelling in and out of the UK mainland in the 1970s and 1980s as a form of racial profiling which was being repeated today with regards to individuals from South Asian backgrounds:

...I remember being treated like an animal, literally, flying in and out of Heathrow airport, being put in a basement without a window with 250-300 other men, women and children in suffocating conditions, without a bottle of water, because we were Irish. There is a name for that now – it is called profiling, you are segregated from the rest of the travelling public because you are Irish. That is now under European legislation an illegal act (Male, 40s, Protestant, Belfast, Non-churchgoer).

A former IRA prisoner, arguing along Maoist lines, believed that such draconian measures were counter-productive and merely increased the ‘pool of water’ in which militants ‘could swim’:

You are thinking back to what used to happen, at Heathrow you used to have some sort of a cow shed set up where the Irish where herded into during the Troubles, they didn’t even bother to provide people with an adequate zone. What those issues don’t do is they don’t alienate the Jihadi because they are alienated anyway, but they are increasing the pool of water in which those guys can swim. Because it goes on a sliding scale, those that are mildly disenchanted become greatly disenchanted, those that are not disenchanted become mildly disenchanted, that type of thing. When that happens, or does happen, it sort of has a rippling effect, people who might talk to the police if they saw something think ‘Maybe I didn’t see anything’. Somebody that may say to the boys, ‘I don’t think maybe you should be doing that’, will say, ‘Well leave them be’, and on and on it goes. It’s a huge issue (Male, 50s, Catholic, Armagh, Non-churchgoer).

Throughout the research a number of interviewees were at pains to suggest that the British government were in danger of alienating more Muslims by their security policies as was the case with some members of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland. Catholic interviewees tended to frame this view on their own personal experience during the Troubles, but it was also an issue which was recognised by a number of Protestants as well. The main difference, which was highlighted by one interviewee, was that essentially the legitimacy of the UK state as an entity is not being challenged within the ‘War on Terror’ while the legitimacy of the state in the Irish situation was at the heart of the conflict. Nevertheless, there remained a general feeling that lessons could and should be learned from Northern Ireland with regards dealing with ‘extremism’ and those willing to use force of arms.
Summary

While participants felt that religion can act as a powerful force for good, at times religion, or more specifically an interpretation of theological texts, can also be used as a motivation for violence. Although most interviewees were reluctant to speak on the subject, a small number of individuals, including regular churchgoers, felt that at certain times and under certain circumstances violence could be morally justified.

The dominant view, even amongst churchgoing Protestants, was that the Northern Irish conflict was essentially a political dispute and as such had to be resolved eventually through dialogue. However, many felt that attacks such as 7/7 and 9/11 were primarily motivated by theology. It was felt that this was much harder to deal with because it is much more difficult to negotiate with religious ‘fanatics’ than when a political goal is involved.

Some however felt that there were political elements to some of the violent incidents which have occurred within the parameters of the ‘War on Terror’. In this regard there was some concern that various security measures such as stop and search, profiling and powers of detention which had been used in Northern Ireland may end up alienating sections of the Muslim population in the UK.

The tendency throughout the research to generalise about the ‘Other’, whether it be in the Northern Irish or broader ‘War on Terror’ context, was an interesting one in terms of relating to perceptions of (in)security. This will be discussed in the following and final section alongside some other concluding remarks.
8. Discussion and Conclusions

Many of the people I met with in this district seem to know well and greatly pride themselves in the fact they are Protestants, yet it appeared to me that they do not know much of their Bibles (Unitarian Minister Alistair McIntyre writing in his diary after a visit to Sandy Row on 21st November 1853, referenced in Doyle 2010: 16).

An article in the New Yorker last summer by James Wood suggested that the religious assume that questions on the nature of religion are invalid because they already have the answer, while atheists assume that all questions relating to religion are invalid because they cannot answer them. Such a stubbornness is often reflected in competing analyses of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

For those who suggest that the conflict was religious, the religious differences trump all other ethnic and political attachments, all of which are of secondary importance as the conflict is de facto between Catholics and Protestants. For those individuals who dismiss any role of religion in the context of the conflict, the territorial or political aspirations of the Unionist and Nationalist populations, who just so happen to be predominantly Protestant and Catholic respectively, mean that religion was not a contributing factor. As has been well documented elsewhere (Ruane and Todd 1996, Liechty and Clegg 2001; Mitchell 2006; Ganiel 2008), such reductionist views restrict the conflict to either a ‘holy war’ or political contest which either way are based upon simplistic assumptions of the role of religion in individual and communal identity formation.

While theorists such as Steve Bruce could perhaps be said to have overplayed the significance of religion as an explanatory factor of conflict in Northern Ireland, similarly proponents of ethno-nationalism, such as Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, have perhaps been too quick to dismiss the role of religion in communal boundary formation. Our research would appear to suggest that the work of theorists such as Claire Mitchell, who draws upon Jay Demerath’s (2000; 2001) formulation of ‘cultural religion’, provides a more nuanced overview of the role of religion in the communal divide. While not suggesting that religion was the primary driver behind the conflict, nevertheless, Mitchell asserts that religion acts as more than just a marker of ethno-national communities in Northern Ireland, and religion can and does give structure, value and meaning to this communal boundary (Mitchell 2006).

In our research, religion gives meaning to the communal boundary even for some of those individuals who suggest that they are of no religious belief, to paraphrase Reverend


98 Although paradoxically Bruce argues forcibly for the secularization/marginalization of religion in the UK as a whole.
McIntyre – are proud Protestants but know little of their Bibles. It does so by assisting in the construction of what it means to be a Protestant or a Catholic. Bruce (1986) and Morrow (1997) argue that religious symbolism can appeal even to the ‘unchurched’ who understand the rituals, symbols and practices of their particular church. Even those who no longer consider themselves to be religious or no longer go to church have at some point in their lives, and most likely when they were younger, been more engaged with religious practices which may have helped influence some of their perceptions in the present.

At times some of our interviewees appeared to base their sense of self and of ‘Other’ on stereotypes which may in part be theologically constructed, even if they themselves were not regular churchgoers. They were, however, familiar with what could be perceived to be fairly stereotypical views of individual conscience and personal freedom which lead to fragmentation and division for Protestants, or religious devotion in education and strength in unity and purpose of the Catholic community.

Perhaps most significantly of all as Mitchell suggests (2006) is when these, in part theologically derived stereotypes, move into the political realm and they then help us decide how the ‘Other’ acts, or help us to explain or make sense of their actions. While therefore it is not overly surprising when a unionist politician is accused of ‘intransigence’ or ‘stubbornness’ which is typical of the stereotypical Protestant ‘bigot’, when Martin McGuinness denies being a ‘liar’ in relation to his past actions in the IRA, old stereotypes about ‘deviousness’ or the ‘untrustworthiness’ of Catholics may come to mind for some Protestants.

In such contexts religiously infused stereotypes can play a role in explaining the actions of the ‘Other’ in the political sphere which make sense, often because they correspond with things that have been learnt growing up – even for some of those who no longer ‘believe’. To invert Grace Davie’s terminology (1994), they do not need to believe to know they belong to either the Protestant or Catholic community. This would also suggest that how we define religion is important. Indeed, the meaning of ‘religion’ shifts depending on occasion, congregation and devotee and therefore it is very difficult to define what exactly religion is (Murphy 2010: 251).

As Mitchell (2006) has argued, a narrow definition of religion based upon easily measurable variables tends only to consider those who go to church every week as falling under the influence of religion and ignores the broader social function which religion can play. This should be borne in mind when considering the potential impact of ‘secularisation’ in the Northern Irish context and the strong correlation even between those who assert they are ‘non-religious’ and national identities in our research suggests that it is perhaps premature to talk of trends towards secularisation impacting upon political identities (Brewer 2004; 99 For a critique of ‘Believing Without Belonging’, see Voas, D., and Crockett, A. (2005) ‘Religion in Britain: Neither Believing not Belonging’. In, Sociology, Vol. 39(1), pp.11-28.
Elliott 2009). These assertions tend to be based upon survey data where these intricacies are much harder explored.

It also appears to be the case that this religiously influenced discourse which presents the ‘Other’ (and particularly the Catholic Other) as unified and strong in comparison to the weakness of one’s own church and community can impact upon perceptions of the security situation. This was most notably the case with regards to representations of the dissidents as mere extensions of the PIRA and of the Catholic Church as supporting the republican movement. Once established, such a discourse within the ‘sectarian system’ (Liechty and Clegg 2001) is justified by only the occasional act which fits within this framework of understanding – therefore the attendance of 60 priests at the funeral of Raymond McCreech becomes the focus of attention rather than on the Catholic Church pronouncements that the hunger-strikers were committing suicide or the IRA statement during the hunger-strikes which accused the Catholic Church of taking a stance which was ‘extremely immoral and misleading’ (Maloney 2002: 236-237).

While it has been argued that Irish identity has in part been constructed on the ideal of the ‘suffering, persecuted Catholic Church’ (Elliott 2009: 154), the Church has always had a much more ambiguous relationship with physical force Irish republicanism. The Church in Ulster supported the Act of Union in 1800 (Rafferty 1994; Mitchell 2003), the Papacy denounced the Fenian Movement in the nineteenth century and IRA membership was banned in 1935 (Gallagher and Worrall 1982).

These complexities of history however are somewhat lost within the ‘sectarian system’ which is based upon the inclination to view the church of the ‘Other’ as more complicit in violence than ‘our’ church, effectively, a tendency to judge one’s perceived opponents more harshly than would oneself in a conflict setting (Shirlow and McGovern: 1997: 3; Liechty and Clegg 2001). In this context, one is reminded of Matthew 7, verse 3, and the focus on the speck in a friend’s eye while ignoring the log in one’s own. In this regard, the churches should be conscious of the message which they may be sending out to members of the ‘Other’ community when making a statement or acting politically.

In some ways, while the Agreement must be welcomed for drastically reducing levels of political violence, it could also be argued that the political settlement contributes to insecurity because it concretises difference in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’ which is reflected in voting patterns in most elections, when Protestants predominantly vote DUP and Catholics predominantly vote Sinn Féin. Although the Good Friday Agreement stated that everyone born in Northern Ireland had a right to be British, Irish or both, the system at present is predicated on relatively simplistic binary opposites, which further entrench perceived cultural differences and can contribute to feelings of insecurity particularly in relation to interfaces or parade related disputes. There is often a perennial sense of threat or cultural insecurity in the zero-sum world that is Northern Ireland politics where compromise is a dirty word and politics is merely a game of concessions to the ‘Other’ side. The dispute in
relation to the building of more than 200 new houses at the Girdwood Barracks site in North Belfast is a case in point highlighting that the precarious sharing out of resources within this ‘separate but equal’ context is never far away from increasing tensions at a political, and more broadly, a community level.\(^{100}\)

A review of the CSI document indicates that while the watchwords are ‘fairness, equality and inclusion’ and there is a desire to respect ‘our differing cultures’ (OFMDFM 2010), underlying this is an assumption that political identities in Northern Ireland are inherent and subject to little change. The machinations of government, census forms, equal opportunity data and many aspects of Northern Irish society are all predicated on the notion that there are two distinct communities, and without the space required for those who wish to break out of these restricted categorisations, divisions are likely to persist.

It is also significant that if CSI said little about overcoming differences, it also did not include all the relevant parties who should be included in the discussion. If, as we suggest, the communal divide in Northern Ireland is more than just a political conflict and involves religious ideas and influences at some level, it is important that the churches are included in discussions moving forward about how to tackle ongoing segregation and sectarianism and their own role in these processes. It would also appear that, for the main Protestant denominations, there are a number of issues which will need to be addressed in terms of the perceptions that they cater predominantly for ‘garden-centre unionists’ and have ‘abandoned’ the Protestant working-class who, in turn, have increasingly ‘abandoned’ them.

The inclination to generalise about the ‘Other’ while clarifying one’s own position was also reflected in perceptions on the difference between the Northern Ireland conflict and the broader ‘War on Terror’. While it was viewed that religion was not significant in the local conflict, theological motivations were viewed as crucial for ‘Islamic fundamentalists’ who were much harder to deal with as they were ‘irrationally’ motivated by religion. Indeed, these binary opposites in the local setting of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are somewhat subsumed within the broader global context of the ‘War on Terror’ when the ‘Other’ become ‘non-Christians’ and, more specifically, Muslims. As such, interviewees took time to highlight the complexity of the local situation (as they had done with their ‘own side’ in the Northern Irish context) which was primarily about politics while suggesting that those involved in attacks such as 9/11 and 7/7 were primarily motivated by theology.

While we would not suggest that there are not theological motivations involved in violence, the reduction of complex and potentially multiple factors which may influence why, where and how violent attacks take place to purely being a result of religious fundamentalism serves to delegitimise the ‘Other’ as irrational and tends to rule out the potential for dialogue. It may well be the case that violent incidents are religiously motivated, driven by

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sectarianism or are acts of ‘terrorism’, but it is at best naïve and at worst extremely dangerous to reduce all motivations of violence to the works of ‘fanatical’ religious fundamentalists or what one interviewee sarcastically referred to as ‘mad mullahs and dodgy imams’.

That is not to say one agrees with or justifies an act of violence, as it may involve an horrendous act against innocent civilians, but (mis)diagnosing everything as religious fundamentalism tends to exclude the potential for dialogue with ‘irrationally’ motivated ‘fanatics’. Even actions which are odious may be rational (from the perspective of the perpetrator) rather than ‘irrational’. Effectively therefore, the differing parties may have completely differing frameworks for understanding why certain actions occur and as such there is no recourse for a peaceful solution. It may be worth bearing this in mind in the context of the UK government strategy for dealing with ‘international terrorism’ – CONTEST, which says little in relation to possible political motivations for violence other than the fact that individuals can draw upon an ‘interpretation of religion, history and politics to legitimate terrorism’ (Home Office 2011).

For those interviewees who focused on the political nature of the Northern Ireland conflict, it is also important to note that even the most secular political nationalism is much more than a political ideology, it also acts as a ‘surrogate religion’ (Smith 2001: 33). Anthony Smith’s discussion of the cult of the ‘Glorious Dead’ is particularly pertinent in this regard as it indicates heroic self-sacrifice on behalf of the nation and its manifest destiny (Smith 2001: 143 -144). The ‘Glorious Dead’ are commemorated annually in Northern Ireland with each side commemorating their ‘own’. Given that we face a raft of upcoming historical anniversaries including the Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising in 2016, the ‘Glorious Dead’ are likely to assume even greater significance in coming years.

Now is perhaps an opportune time for individuals, both inside and outside church structures, to discuss the role of the churches in the context of the conflict, as well as looking at how the churches may positively contribute to ongoing peace-building work in the future. Such frank discussions may provide an opportunity for some within the churches to set the record straight on what many of them did or didn’t do during the Troubles and challenge perceptions which may never have been challenged, or live up to challenges that the churches need to face with regards to their responsibilities in terms of helping to maintain societal division.

The latter is particularly important given the stance of some churches on the issue of flags and emblems which clearly associates them with one community or the other. To paraphrase one of our key informants, if at times some churches were silent during the Troubles, now is the time to speak, if at times some churches conformed during the Troubles, now is the time to challenge. Such vision may feed into opportunities to think
creatively about how we can commemorate the upcoming raft of historical anniversaries in a revised light, reassessing the role of religion and that of the churches as part of the process.

The following are a number of key points and recommendations emerging from the research:

1. Individuals and institutions should critically examine their own perceptions of the religious ‘other’ and seek to avoid unintended consequences from the implicit assumptions that may still be built into public pronouncements;

2. Physical and metaphorical spaces need to be developed to bridge and transcend the binary opposites institutionalised by The Agreement;

3. The churches still have an important role to play in discussions on how to tackle ongoing segregation and sectarianism;

4. The Protestant denominations should seek to explore new ways of (re)engaging with the Protestant working-class;

5. Lateral thinking from the Northern Ireland situation indicates that it is unhelpful if preoccupation with the perceived religious roots of international ‘terrorism’ distracts attention from political factors which may be easier, and more appropriate, to address;

6. There is still a need to learn lessons from the history of security policy in Northern Ireland with regards to detention without trial, and in particular, the alienating consequences of ‘profiling’ a whole community; and

7. The onset of the decade of anniversaries is an opportune time to (re)assess the somewhat ambivalent record of the churches during the Troubles and for exploring their still considerable potential to contribute to ongoing peace-building work.
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