

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
COMMITTEE ON CHURCH AND NATION
An Ard Sheanadh Eaglais na h-Alba
COMATAIDH NA h-EAGLAISE AGUS AN NÀISEIN



Report
to
The General Assembly
2002

THE DEMON IN OUR SOCIETY:
SECTARIANISM IN SCOTLAND

The Committee on Church & Nation
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FOREWORD

The reason for publishing this report on Sectarianism separately is summed up in the theme running through it: "Sectarianism is not someone else's problem". It is our hope that, by considering the contents of the report, the readers will be moved to consider for themselves and for their communities the challenges it poses.

What are the prejudices I carry around, often without noticing? What are the ways in which I blame others for separation, when I could be doing something myself? Are there things I could be changing in myself or in the circles to which I belong?

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, when it received this report in May 2002, expressed its regret for actions in the past. It also called on congregations to study this matter for themselves in their own contexts - and to adopt for themselves the Nil-by-Mouth Charter.

It is our hope that many will do so, so that we can all tackle that quiet, hidden, often 'polite' prejudice which can erupt into anger, threat, intimidation and violence - scarring individuals, communities and our whole society.

Our thanks go to the Drummond Trust for their financial support of this publication.

The Committee on Church and Nation would be interested to receive news of the results of any discussions congregations have as a result of it.

Alan McDonald, Convener, Church & Nation Committee.

Instruct the Church and Nation Committee to carry out a study of the adverse effects of sectarianism within Scottish society and report to the General Assembly of 2002 and encourage all who work throughout the Church to work to overcome sectarian barriers. (General Assembly 2001)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The format of this report reflects the process undertaken by the Committee. We realised at an early stage that it would not be wise to rush to conclusions about what is a large and complex subject. We have instead approached the topic in a spirit of humility and with an attitude of listening. The style and content reflect what we have learnt from the conversations we have had, the reading we have done and the research we have carried out. We offer our recommendations, not as "experts" but as those that have participated in and seek to reflect Scottish society as experienced in 2001-2002.
- 1.2 Although the report is limited to sectarianism between Protestant and Catholic, it is our contention that much of what has been learned is readily applicable to other forms of bigotry and intolerance, evident in Scottish society today.

Sectarianism in Scotland today ...

- is seen and heard in the small asides which say little and reveal much
- is most publicly evident in behaviour associated with football matches but is by no means confined to this.
- is, thanks to recent legislation and changing patterns in society, less blatant than before in employment and recruitment practices but continues to generate claims of prejudice in the work situation.
- is still, in its most extreme form, ugly, intimidating and murderous, including a series of attacks on a priest in Easterhouse and the murders of eleven Rangers and Celtic football fans since 1995;
- is still very much in the public eye, generating extensive media coverage and comment
- is capable of demonstrating itself throughout Scotland. It is not limited to cities and urban communities
- is pervasive and will continue to be so unless we are willing to search our own consciences and to review our own language, attitudes and actions.

Sectarianism is not someone else's problem. It is an issue for all of us.

2. We have researched our past

- 2.1 We have researched our past as the Church of Scotland and we have learned that our Church's record on this issue in times past is far from blameless.
- 2.2 In the years around the Great Depression of the early thirties of last century, the Church and Nation Committee campaigned intemperately against Irish immigration into Scotland.

- 2.3** The reports and letters of the Committee from 1926 to 1934 on this issue make disturbing reading today. Let one quotation from a letter written by the Committee to the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1926 stand as one example. On the subject of Irish Immigration the Committee writes:

A law-abiding, thrifty and industrious race (the Scots) is being supplanted by immigrants whose presence tends to lower the social conditions, and to undermine that spirit of independence which has so long been a characteristic of the Scottish people, and we are of opinion that, in justice to our own people, steps should be taken to prevent the situation becoming any worse.

- 2.4** This is racism akin to the "rivers of blood" speech of Enoch Powell in the 1960s. The Irish immigrants are shown in the worst possible light. No attempt is made at understanding the social and economic conditions both in Ireland and Scotland, which produced the immigration and shaped the character and life-style of the immigrants. Of course, the great majority of the immigrants were Roman Catholic and the sectarian implications are clear.

From a current perspective, it is a matter of regret that the Committee and the Church could have taken such a position.

- 2.5** Reflecting on this, it is worth making two comments:

- 2.5.1** First, it is cautionary to note the prejudice that so recently infected churchmen and a committee, which in general were generous and socially concerned. It ought to raise for us the question as to where our blind spots and prejudices are today. We may consider ourselves enlightened nowadays, but unless we are prepared to put ourselves under the spotlight we may also be judged, in hindsight, to have turned a blind eye to sectarian attitudes which still remain on and under the surface of the Church of Scotland of today.

- 2.5.2** Second, while the issue of continuing sectarian attitudes and practices must be pursued with sensitivity and vigour, we do have to recognise that a demon in our society has been acknowledged and brought into the open. Much progress in breaking down barriers across Scottish society has been made since the days of the 1930s. Ecumenical relations, friendship and co-operation between the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church have improved greatly at both official and local parish levels in the last fifty years.

3. We have listened

We have met and listened to many individuals and groups, both secular and church-based, who recognise the effects of sectarianism in Scottish society and are working in different ways to counter it. These include:

3.1 *Cara Henderson, founder of Nil by Mouth*

Cara Henderson was a school friend of Mark Scott, the Glasgow schoolboy who was brutally murdered on his way home from a Celtic v Rangers football match

in 1995. She was moved to act, however, by Donald Findlay's singing of sectarian songs at a Rangers Supporters function in 1999. Her letter to *The Herald* about this event evoked a huge response – much very supportive, some very abusive. This in turn encouraged Cara to “do something”, which became Nil by Mouth.

Nil by Mouth acts as a catalyst by asking the awkward questions and raising awareness of the issues. In 2001, Nil by Mouth launched its Social Charter, inviting people to sign up to a code which challenges sectarian attitudes, language and behaviour (see Appendix 1). They believe that language is a key factor and that, by fostering attitudes of tolerance and respect, a positive change is possible in Scottish society.

It is through the work of this very small group and its dedicated founder that much has happened in the West of Scotland.

3.2 *Celtic Football Club has developed its own social charter*

Celtic F.C. and Rangers F.C. are working together with Glasgow City Council to develop educational materials for incorporation into the school curriculum.

Celtic FC and Rangers FC, along with Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Presbytery and the Archdiocese of Glasgow, have come together to promote the Millennium Awards, which will be granted to individuals working against sectarianism in local situations (see below).

3.3 *Glasgow City Council*

On 22 February 2001, Glasgow City Council formally recognised that sectarianism continues to be a major problem facing Glasgow and the West of Scotland and instructed the Chief Executive to identify current policy and how that might be developed. The report from the Executive argued that in the absence of a coherent assessment of the scale, nature, causes and impact of sectarianism, future policy might not be as well informed as it might be, and therefore policy made from a flawed basis. Research has been commissioned and is at present being undertaken. It will attempt to describe the features of sectarianism in Glasgow today, who is affected, and how and what the scale of the problem is. The findings of this report will be key to future work for churches in Glasgow and it is hoped will provide baseline data for other academic work.

3.4 *Sense over Sectarianism*

A joint initiative between Glasgow City Council, Rangers FC, Celtic FC, Glasgow Presbytery and Glasgow Archdiocese has been set up. Each organisation has two representatives (in theory, one policy maker and one practitioner). The mere fact of their getting together in this way is a significant breakthrough. The initiative has received over £500,000 from the Millennium Awards to distribute to individuals who are tackling sectarianism locally. A co-ordinator has been appointed who will promote the scheme, support applications and facilitate the assessment process. Several innovative applications have already been received and the Church and Nation Committee learned how seriously the issue is being taken.

3.5 *Celtic and Rangers Football Clubs*

Football, and what goes on around football, provides the context for the most overt expression of sectarianism in Scottish society and as such defines us quite differently from expressions of sectarianism in Northern Ireland. The Committee met