

MARCH AT DRUMCREE

Today I have been thinking about the march in Drumcree and how it is so much more than a political problem. In England we expect our politicians to be concerned with the 'what' and 'how' of issues in our community. Things are different in Northern Ireland.

There, politics are inextricably bound up with the religious divide. When we in England approach an issue that concerns us deeply, such as poverty, there is usually agreement that it should be reduced and on the different ways in which this could be achieved. Different Governments try varying mixes and though we may disagree with the balance chosen, by and large we let them get on with their preferred solution until the next general election.

In Northern Ireland there is an additional factor to add to the 'how' and 'what': there is the question 'why'. For the march in Drumcree the fundamental questions are not what route to follow, but why it should take place at all or, from the other side, why a 'tradition' should be tampered with. For each religious community both the question chosen and the answer given are different. And what makes a solution even more difficult is that many on both sides see even negotiation with those of a different tradition as a compromise with evil, a betrayal of the teaching of the Church and therefore unacceptable in principle.

To enter into dialogue in such a climate takes real courage, a courage that was shown in full measure by those who reached the Good Friday Agreement. I am recording this on the Friday morning before the march so I do not know if a solution will be found by the time you hear this, but Drumcree is only one of the tests that the Spirit which inspired the Good Friday Agreement will face over the coming months. Let us pray that all those who have power or bear responsibility in Northern Ireland may, in the words of that ancient prayer, find the courage to change those things that must be changed, the strength to bear those that cannot be changed and the wisdom to tell the difference.

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