

A Sense of Community

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INTRODUCTION

A survey once identified ninety four different definitions of community, and the only idea they all had in common was "people".ⁱ This is a pointer to the difficulty we may have in attempting to define or describe or even get a sense of community. Nevertheless, the analysis and definition of any socio-political term has never been straightforward.

The root idea of the word "community" is derived from *com* - together and *munus* - obligation, hence, "a mutual obligation". The word indicates a wide or deep quality of relations within a group of people: wide and comprehensive, spanning a variety of roles and areas of life, deep in commitment and fidelity. Throughout the history of the word's usage, "community" tended to mean informal, small-scale, local, personal and immediate relationships rather than larger, formal, or organised relationships such as ones encountered in nation, state or general society. Community designated the human and humane side of associating, other words were kept for the focused and purposeful side. A characteristic of the word "community", however, unlike words such as "nation", "state", or "society", is that it was almost always used favourably, (that is, something we should have more of). Because of the favourable connotations attaching to the word, it is difficult to pin down and define in concrete terms, (that is, to identify the attributes of community which allow us to recognise one when we see it.) The word "community" is more a normative term (what we could or should be) than a descriptive term (what we were and are). A writer or speaker would say that some or other group was a "community", and all we could be sure of was that he or she was in favour of it.ⁱⁱ

This "warmly persuasive word" still enjoys "an active social history" (as Raymond Williams would say). Political arguments are raised around it. It appears in the manifestos of political groupings. Much moral discourse turns on it. It occurs in many different arenas, from theology to urban planning. It is a word which can stir hearts --- whether or not it can sharpen thoughts. This paper proposes to clarify the idea and set it in its political, moral, and theological context to arrive at some "Sense of Community".

In to do this, I propose to begin with an outline of some contemporary ideas about community, in the simplest and broadest of strokes, to locate the concept in current political and moral discussion, and then continue by discussing a description of

community, concentrating on the attributes of really existing human groups. Thirdly, I will suggest a definition of community based on the discussion of the description. Fourthly, and lastly, I hope to draw out some suggestions that might have some application for Ireland, or at least provoke some thought and reflection on what has been happening in Ireland, and indeed, in the world during the last year.

PART ONE: Contemporary Debate about Community

Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, gave the BBC Reith Lectures for 1990, under the title *The Persistence of Faith*.ⁱⁱⁱ In these lectures, and in more recent newspaper articles, he argued persuasively and eloquently that western democratic society can not continue to exist depending on individual choice with occasional state intervention.^{iv} Sacks suggests that if the sixties were the era of intense optimism about the ability of the state to generate the just society, the eighties were the decade of disillusion, both in west and east. Many of our old institutions came under intense attack: royalty, government, political parties of all hues, the justice system, the churches, even the holy state of matrimony. Individualism reigned supreme. Then, in the nineties, we are inspecting the ruin of both collectivism and individualism, and despairing of the possibilities for anything new and constructive.

Jonathan Sacks claims that the concept of community is essential to constructive political and social thinking today. He reasons that we as people learn about, and continue to sustain our hopes and fears, our moral challenges and our social contributions, our personal commitments and our collective values, our private virtue and our public vision in what he terms "communities of memory and character."^v We learn our language and tradition of morality, and our ideas about the common good from communities of meaning. Sacks describes the process:

"I can understand my life as a chapter in a larger narrative. That is what Jews, Christians and others do when they grow up within a religious tradition, and what Aristotle believed education was: induction into a community."^{vi}

Accordingly Sacks calls for a renewal of community thinking and religious tradition, not as a revival of sectarianism and separatism, but precisely as underpinning a tolerant and inclusive commonwealth, as a moral and cultural foundation for national society.

Communities of meaning mediate between the state with its collective and potentially totalitarian thrust, and individuals with their potentially mutually conflicting interests. Communities moderate and direct individual allegiances into socially constructive paths, which are personally valuable and humanly and socially meaningful. In this call, Sacks joins a wider stream of thought from America, which criticises the liberal individualism of

modern western democracy -- those critics represented by Alasdair MacIntyre, Robert Bellah, and Philip Selznick -- and offers a diagnosis of the West's sickly condition.^{vii} Typical of the diagnosis would be Larry Rasmussen, with his graphic description of the process by which market and state have eroded community living, whereby the powerful forces of modern political economy replaced community ties with transient impersonal relationships of commerce, media, transportation, and communication of all kinds.^{viii} Symbolic, if not typical, is Amitai Etzioni, the sociologist of organisations, who has developed the diagnosis of a sick society into the charter of a healing movement, which he dubs "Communitarianism." He describes "Communitarianism" as an attempt to strengthen the moral foundations of society by supporting the family, reintroducing attention to moral upbringing and character formation into schools, investing more private and public effort into voluntary associations of all kinds, and re-emphasising over-arching constitutional values of civic order and democratic society.^{ix}

Most commentators of this persuasion refer with regularity and approval to Alasdair MacIntyre, and to Robert Bellah and his various collaborators, who have, between them, framed the debate about community and its uses, and largely dictated its development. MacIntyre may be said to have cast definitive doubt on the possibility of rational individuals arriving at any useful moral consensus sufficient for society. In contrast, he maintains that the existence of tradition and moral community are necessary for moral consensus. In his own final words:

"What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however, the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time."^x

Bellah and the others may be read as an elaboration of MacIntyre, either documenting with acute observations from people's lives how far the process of "de-communifying" has gone, or discerning the seeds of hope that might be, even now, fanned into moral growth.

PART TWO: Description of Community

This logically raises the question: what do we mean by "Community". What do people mean when they use the word? What is a community? How do we know when we have one? What different kinds of community are there? After all, the word can be used to mean almost any kind of human living or sharing together. Because community has a such

a broad application, we can be easily confused when the word is used. It is therefore important to specify its meaning. We may not arrive at a completely satisfactory definition, but we should be able to frame a reasonable consistent description.

There are a number of components normally included under the heading of "Community"; Common Location, Common Interests, Common Participation, and Common Identity. The survey mentioned at the beginning of this article showed that most of the definitions surveyed (73%) included geographical area, common ties, and social interaction, which correspond to location, interests and participation.^{xi} Each is implicated with each other, and indeed, may lead one to the other. It is probable that there is a time order among the components, that is, sharing a common territory or location may lead to common activities that may lead to common views and values, and finally, may lead to commitment of people to each other. Questions surround each of these components and their interaction.

(a) Common Location

The first and most obvious component for community is a common location. People find themselves in a community by birth or residence because they share a common territory. In the past, people normally did not join the city or town or village or neighbourhood in which they grew up and lived out their lives, in the same way that they now join their golf clubs. Their residence in this place or in that place was enforced by other considerations. People's geography is determined by their history.

This leads to the first question around the issue of common location. In a mobile civilisation - where people increasingly do make choices of their place of residence, and those are quite different from their places of work - does not that choice rather than the location itself become the real factor? Would not common interests, common class, common economic status, common leisure activities, or even, common stage of life, or whatever other motives dictated the choice of residence, be more important for the formation of a modern community? We are already familiar with the concept of "retirement community." Many neighbourhoods in modern American suburbia are more collections of like-minded individuals in "lifestyle enclaves", than natural communities stemming from people's occupation of common territory.^{xii} Is common territory, then, necessary for the definition or description of community? Is common location sufficient for the definition or description of community?

The second question follows. A common location implies some measure of shared life. In past times, people who were fellow townsmen or countrymen lived, worked, played, worshipped, and died in the same place as each other. Nowadays, however, few places of residence -neighbourhoods - include a place of work, and practically none would include within their boundaries, the places of power and privilege where political and economic decisions are made which affect the daily life of its residents. Modern "dormitory suburbs" consist of homes and areas for recreation, education, and the retailing and other services necessary to sustain them. Invariably places of employment and industry are excluded by law from residential neighbourhoods, and residents are forced to travel each day to their places of work. A World Council of Churches report on pastoral life in the European Churches found that the contemporary congregation or parish no longer fulfilled the conditions for a full human community, and recommended that the churches look to a wider division, a city area, for example-- the *zone humaine* -- which might include all sectors of daily life.^{xiii} So the question is: can a modern residential neighbourhood - a dormitory suburb or lifestyle enclave - include enough of human living to provide an adequate foundation for a true community? Or, given that territory is at least necessary, what is the sufficient territorial quantity for community?

(b) Common Interests

The term "community" is often nowadays applied to a group of people with supposedly common interests, but with no suggestion of sharing a common place or territory. Reference is made, for example, to the educational community, the gay community, the Catholic community, the Presbyterian community, the medical community. The media are sometimes held responsible for this re-ification of widely dispersed persons into imaginary groups.^{xiv} The media often suggest by the ready use of the term "community" that these groupings have common interests which seem to be depicted as wider and deeper, more cohesive and monolithic, less varied and divergent than in fact they might be. The "medical community", for example, as a description, does not distinguish between junior doctors, senior consultants, nurses, hospital administrators, general public, paramedics, and patients, who are certainly each and all have separate "interests" in the medical enterprise and the health care industry.

This allusion to widely scattered "communities of interest" may seem to be irrelevant, but it points up a deep cleavage in community literature: between those who regard community as a result of common territorial occupation or spatial proximity, and those who see community as stemming from a sense of similar interests. The irony is that those forces which critics of modernity would regard as destructive of true community are now being installed as possible causes of a new kind of community. Thus, the question arises:

does common location, residential and working, naturally cause community ? or does community nowadays have to be built intentionally, even in areas of common residence and labour ? and can true community be formed, in the absence of neighbourhood among those sharing the same profession, or vocation, or aspiration ?

Hillery (he of the ninety four definitions) mounted a sustained attack on this question.^{xv}

He compares the folk village (wherein residence, work and all the inhabitants' social roles were contained in a confined area), with the modern city (a much larger, denser, and differentiated settlement), and with the total institution (which purposely directs and confines the lives of members even to the extent of blocking free association with non-members). He suggests that the village is unquestionably a community, that the city can contain ingredients of community, but that the total institution is not a community in any sense. The decisive factor in community, according to Hillery, would seem to be the absence of explicit purpose. Inhabitants or members of true community may share goals, motivations, or reasons for belonging to it; but they also share large areas of living which are unrelated to the original purpose. Membership of a total institution, by contrast, are dominated by the goal of the institution, and the shared living can add nothing to it.

This helps to sharpen the notion of Common Interests. It is not interests that relate to particular wishes or actions, as we might carelessly assume. Interests cannot be equated with goals -- which are the objectives of actions or desires, nor with motives -- which initiate or propel actions, nor with purposes -- which are the aims, ends, or reasonable meanings of actions. "Interest" is defined by the Shorter Oxford Dictionary as "the relation of being objectively concerned in something, by having a right or title to, a claim upon, or a share in (something)." The tenor of meanings given by the dictionary characterise interest as arising out of past situations whereby one is affected by matters, rather than decisive and intentional engagements for future actions. Thus, the interests which are common among members of a community are based probably on a common history of traditions, practices, origins, experiences, values and standards. And the question remains: how can this history come about ? can it be intentionally constructed ? and is neighbourhood a requirement for the common interest which arises from it ? does a common geography cause a shared history ? Is it only a common geography which causes a shared history ?

(c) Common Participation

Traditions, practices, origins, experiences, introduces common participation.

Community theorists, as we have seen, divide into two camps: those who rely on territory (geography) and thus see community as formed from the location in which it

exists, and those who centre their notion of community on people and view community as arising from their actions and activities (history).

The general theme of the literature of community focuses on shared activities, which may be designated as "sustained actions." Philip Selznick may be taken as an example. In his recent examination of "the moral community", he describes community as one form of group experience which stresses shared beliefs, interests, and commitments around a set of varied activities. He explicitly states that there can be more or less community, that it is a variable, and not at all a discrete category. The key to the existence of community for Selznick, however, is the "comprehensiveness" of the kinds of activities which people share within it. An organisation is a measured sharing of one sector of one's life, one type of action or one activity, one clear common purpose, but a community flows over into other segments of living. "The emergence of community depends on the opportunity for, and the impulse toward, comprehensive interaction, commitment and responsibility."^{xvi} History -- that is, a record of shared activities that have mattered to the people taking part - - is the strongest source for community building. Ideals and aspirations which are visionary and future-oriented fail to inspire an equal "impulse, or open the opportunity toward comprehensive interaction, commitment and responsibility". The past, (with its words and mottoes and slogans and songs, memories of valued institutions, the sacred turf and boundaries of hallowed grounds, rituals and ceremonies celebrating significant events and decisive moments) is the seedbed of robust community growth. This runs in the face of the modern assumption that rational, non-personal, calculative, almost economical decision-making is the universal recipe for building bonds between people. On the contrary, it appears that the particular, personal, emotional, history-laden allegiances, the roots and twisted branches of our social selves are the necessary ingredient for community-building, because they embody, better than anything else, the special experience, the unique story, the authentic ethos and atmosphere, the culture, language, and guidance which express the limits and can expand the horizons of a people.

Another question concerns the breadth of shared activities. The impulse to community comes not just from a shared past, but a broadly shared past. A narrow and limited, or sharply defined set of social interactions, or worse, an imposed condition which limits collaboration to such hard-and-fast limits, prevents rather than encourages community. The chance must be there to develop contacts into other areas, encompassing more areas of daily living, from work relationships to leisure activities, from cultural practices to religious ones, from political co-operation to social interaction on a broad front. Such interaction should be reciprocal, or move towards it, so that people generally experience the interdependence of their lives in a real way. This does not mean, necessarily, as

Selznick is quick to indicate, that all social relationships have to be included, nor that there cannot be inequalities at particular times or around particular issues, but the potential and the momentum must be present towards greater openness. There can be no closure for true community. Persons form communities as unities, not as segments of specialised activities. And this is the function of "intermediate associations." Participation in true mutuality, with real trust in real persons, can be better assured in relatively small-scale groups, rather than in mass social gatherings. The limits and controls on participation in such settings relate not to the content of the shared lives, but to the number of other lives to which any one person is required to respond.^{xvii}

There is one more point to be made. Participation in community activities presupposes ownership and identification. When people engage in shared living, they are inevitably involved with one another. If common location enables involvement, the spending of time together (which shared activity implies) causes involvement (The distinction is between a *conditio sine qua non* and a cause in its own right.) This has been the basic principle of community development: community workers universally agree that individual citizens must participate actively in their neighbourhoods and organisations and institutions in order to create true community and to have any hope of identifying themselves as real members.^{xviii}

(d) Common Identity

Most commentators agree that common identity is the most problematic of the components of community.^{xix} One obvious reason is that common identity is a "two edged sword" --- it can be most easily generated as the obverse side of intergroup hostility. We identify with each other the more strongly, because we are all against those others. Instead of a community, we would have a tribe.

Common identity is initially easy to characterise. It is a "we" feeling, a sense of personal and social commitment, a sense of belonging and owed allegiance, a feeling of needing certain people to complete one's own life, of interdependence. But it is not the same as a personal friendship or a family intimacy. Certainly, primary group or family type relationships are wide and deep in the manner described already. In a small group, people relate closely and with attention to the unique qualities of each person, in an open-ended fashion, by a great variety of actions and activities which consume a great deal of time, and generate the most lasting personal claims and moral obligations to others. But it can be readily appreciated that these affections and feelings can exclude as well as include, can lead to inhuman hatreds as well as humane bonds of love and care, can divide as well as unite. When the stranger is welcomed as a guest, when all strangers are accorded the

rules of hospitality, a moral Rubicon has been crossed. The family and kinship group is now looking outward, and using the model of family to build community. Family and kin is a school of community-building.^{xx}

Thus we need to distinguish "psychic unity" from "community solidarity." Selznick describes the difference by distinguishing the hippie communes of the 1960s from true communities. Communes are comprised of mostly the same kind of people. Their stability and longevity is precarious, because cohesion is unduly dependent on feelings and emotion, and group consciousness. Community includes a wide diversity of people, utilising definite structures, leaving more space (even physical space) between persons and families, and taking definite steps -- scheduled and sustained activities -- to ensure stability. It is not that community impedes rational action and calculated activity. On the contrary, it ensures that action is rational, and aids the calculation that goes into the planning of activities. "The demands of community are not opposed to rational judgement and personal autonomy."^{xxi} Nor is community opposed to injections of morale boosting or *esprit de corps* or moments of sentiment and sensibility. Community provides the context, the framework, the larger picture within which individuals and families and kinship groups and networks and interest groups and all the other passing connections that human beings construct and disengage find meaning and justification in the long-term human moral enterprise.

PART THREE: A Definition of Community

Let us now gather our reflections into a definition of community. The discussion so far has leaned extensively (but not exclusively) on Philip Selznick's recent treatment of the subject. Selznick, however, picked out seven elements in his normative theory of a moral community: historicity, identity, mutuality, plurality, autonomy, participation, and integration. I would consider that the essentials of Selznick's seven elements are satisfactorily comprehended under the headings of the four summary components which we have discussed. Selznick proceeds by way of synthesis: "A fully realised community will have a rich and *balanced* mixture of all these seven elements. (his emphasis)"^{xxii} It remains for us to seek a synthesis of the four components.

One way of doing that is to ask whether each component is "necessary for community" and whether each component is "sufficient for community." This will clarify whether or not all the components are needed to make up community, and which ones could cause community on their own. What these questions presume, of course, is that community is a discrete category, i.e. there is either is community, or there is not community. As we

have seen, Selznick and others regard community as a variable, with the result that one can have more or less community. I think that they are surely correct in this.

Nevertheless, simple questions can clear the ground. I maintain that the four components are necessary, but none of them is sufficient.

Let me explain-- using a shorthand to refer to the components to assist clarity and sharpness. Common location and territory is necessary, it seems to me, to enable and facilitate common participation in shared activities. Without a measure of proximity, the broad and holistic sharing of life which common participation requires, would seem to be impossible. The participants must for some time must have occupied roughly the same space to develop the understanding and tolerance of individuality that full mutual participation demands. What is variable is the size of territory needed: obviously, modern means of communication -- transport or media -- allows for larger territories rather than smaller. Even families can now keep in touch across continents and oceans by telephone and aeroplane. So the boundaries are elastic, and this is the source of the confusion over the role of location. But a **geographical** component is necessary. Common interests are a necessary condition for community, but as we have seen, not necessarily interests in future desires or outcomes, such as a pressure group, or a professional association, or a party or faction might have. Let us call this meaning of common interests, in our rough shorthand, the **political** dimension. But if the common interests stem from the past, that is, from events, and incidents, and stories, and relationships which arise from common shared experiences, then these are necessary, but not sufficient, for community. In our short hand, let us refer to these shared interests, shared values, shared memories, shared traditions, shared ways of looking at the world, as the **cultural** dimension.

A common geography, as we have already suggested, can lead to a shared history. It is clear that this is not always nor even necessarily the case. Mutual participation is by no means enforced by the joint occupation of a territory. It can lead to open warfare.

Nevertheless, it is a common outcome that different segments of a population would interact and mutually respond to each other favourably as a result of shared activities over a long period of time. Let us name this, in our short hand, the **historical** component, and state that this is necessary, but not sufficient, for community.

The fourth component is common identity. Let us call this the **sociological** component.

Often it is recognised retrospectively, and is more often than not, a function of outsiders naming the participants. "It was in Antioch that the disciples were for the first time called 'Christians.'" (*Acts of the Apostles* 12: 26) It can be easily and often is confused with the **psychological** dimension, affectionate ties generated by family or kin, or emotional

bonds flowing from the dynamic of a small group. The relationship of common identity is at once more distant and more stable, more deliberate and more rational, and yet, still capable of arousing deep feeling and engendering great loyalty. So to some extent, a common identity is necessary, but not sufficient, for community.

How are the four components composed? Selznick, it will be recalled, thought that the seven elements which he nominated should be "balanced." It seems to this writer that the four components identified here should be "linked and emergent", that is, one should lead to the other in a natural progression. In fact, probably the most important determinant of a true community, a community in the making, would be the way in which one of these situations evolves into the next. So in a real community, "geography" should lead to "history" which should encourage "culture" and "identity." People embark on the road to community by fostering these links.

If we wish to derive a definition of community, probably the most useful one from this point of view is the one suggested by Derek Phillips. It includes the four components and only the four components in concrete and simple terms:

"A community is a group of people, who live in a common territory, have a common history and shared values, participate together in common activities, and have a high degree of solidarity."^{xxiii}

The point about community is that it is a source of obligations which are different from those promised, volunteered, or agreed when one joins an organisation, and from those created by biological families and natural friendships. Though the obligations are unspecified and largely tacit, they are nonetheless real and pressing in their claims. They are urgent, that is, they push us on from behind, almost without our knowing where the shove is coming from, rather than drawing us on from ahead, where we think that we can see, and so seek to be too clear about the road ahead. They are obligations. They tie us into a certain direction. They entangle us without our sometimes even noticing.

There is an old saying in human life that there is no standing still. One either is progressing, or surely, one is slipping back. There is a dynamism built into the idea of community, which many authors have alluded to, using phrases like "open to", "impulse towards", and so on. These are far too weak. Many sociological and indeed, psychological terms look like nouns, when they are really verbs. They seem to be abstractions, objects, solid things like material hunks, where they are, in fact, actions, processes, intentions, motivations, movements. They are somewhat frozen for our perusal, like an action photograph, or a slow-motion film, but the realities which they express are not at all lifeless, but energetic and powerful. An iceberg is often used to illustrate the nine-tenths hiddenness of things. Its landlubber cousin, the glacier, aptly

depicts the inexorable movement that looks static at first sight, but is groaning and heaving with concealed force underneath like a gigantic living creature. Community, like society itself, is in motion. It can be ridden --- but not confined. There can be more or less community at a particular moment. The corollary is soon there will be more -- or less -- community than there is now. The level of community is either increasing or decreasing, going up or going down. We are either winning or losing. There are no draws, and the game is never over.

PART FOUR: Applications

Are there lessons, applications, practical tactics or strategies to be drawn from these considerations? Is it possible to generate some lines of action which may prove of use in Ireland today?

The first conclusion which seems worthy of notice is that true community is built from the heart of a people, its culture and its history, and not from its head, its calculations and plans. Our hopes and visions are limited and shaped by our memories and our traditions. Dreams of the future, that are not grounded in a secure sense of the past, quickly form and quickly fade. Community enables the present generation to locate themselves realistically, assess their position clearly both in relation to possibilities which have already been lost, as well as to opportunities which were successfully taken. This is what is meant by the community providing the context and framework for moral innovation. The past unites, the future divides. It is more powerful to celebrate the past than envision the future. This is not to discount the value of dreams and visions. But perhaps we are inclined to over-estimate their importance, because we confuse individual and group experience. The individual needs a strong visionary gleam shedding light from the coming dawn, but the group demands the confidence of melodies and tunes remembered and sung during the night that is past. People can more easily launch into the deep when they have a common experience of sailing together in a boat. No charts of unknown waters can substitute for the courage bestowed by the memory of successful (though eventful) voyages.

The second conclusion that springs to mind concerns existing community institutions. An organisation is a human group, constructed of set purpose to accomplish definite goals by agreed methods. An institution is an organisation which embodies values and elicits allegiances and achieves long-term stability, because society as a whole invests much of its concern in it. The armed forces, hospitals, schools and colleges, churches and theatre companies -- all attain privilege and permanence among other organisations because they are the repositories of dreams, hopes, and stories. Institutions are invaluable resources for existing communities, and the scaffolding for building of new communities.

Successful community building must involve institutions and develop institutions, create institutions, link institutions, reform institutions, enable institutions to harness the allegiances of individuals towards common activities, common interests, and common identity. Institutions in a society cannot be by-passed if true community is to emerge. Bellah and his associates comment that this truth is little understood today, in an age which assumes the culture of liberal individualism.^{xxiv} It is felt that institutions infringe upon individual freedom. So dominant opinion-makers today (especially the media) demand that institutions stay neutral, stand off, hold the ring, be non-partisan, not express and certainly not advocate public policies, to do nothing which might seriously influence the sovereign people (thought of as individual citizens) to make up their joint and several minds. They want institutions to be "procedurally neutral," and to confine themselves to that role.^{xxv} Bellah and his associates, Jonathan Sacks, Amitai Etzioni, Robin Gill, Larry Rasmussen and other commentators on the social scene claim that institutions have a part to play in forming community and framing civil democratic society. Without the thick and rich traditions of morality and wisdom conveyed by communities, such as churches, religions, and other cultural resources are able to provide, democratic civil order is thinly protected by the flimsy and insubstantial umbrellas of individual rational choice and state legal sanction. To take one illustration, Robin Gill cites the 1981 research of David Gerard which suggested "that attendance at religious services at least once a month was the most significant variable in predicting whether someone is involved in voluntary work. ...considerably more significant than general expressions of altruism or of social class." Gill draws the conclusion, from this and other findings of social research, that religions and churches may be crucial to encouraging the qualities of caring, compassion, contribution to the community, and a general sense of social duty in modern democratic society.^{xxvi}

CONCLUSION

I am concluding this paper on the anniversary of the Northern Ireland IRA cease-fire. The television schedules are filled with retrospective accounts and prophecies and predictions. Leaving the prognostications aside, what is striking in the stories which are now coming to light about the road to the breakthrough in August 1994, was the part played by the representatives of churches and paramilitary formations (of enviable antiquity and tradition), both in fashioning a strategy for progress and beginning to bring the population at large along with them. One might be forgiven for thinking that the Northern Churches would be so traditional as to be of little help in such delicate and highly charged negotiations, and that groups so radical and extreme as the Republican and Loyalist

Prisoners would have been so inflexible and die-hard that no movement and flexibility would be possible from them. But, by all accounts, both made crucial, one might say, decisive interventions.

Not all institutions and communities are noble. Some are distinctly trivial. But even a football team can be an institution and the repository of history. Another lesson from 1995, and an image which will live in the memory, is Nelson Mandela resplendent in the green Springbok rugby jersey hosting the World Rugby Cup, and celebrating South Africa's victory in the final at the same time. An appropriate use of tradition and symbolism and institution in gathering the power of the past to be a force for the future... Progress is not guaranteed. Community building, like anything else worthwhile in human life, is precarious. H.G. Wells once said that history is a race between education and catastrophe. I prefer to say that history is a race between community and catastrophe- and education is one of humanity's legs. There is no neutral position for us, no middle ground of decent civilised living where people can coexist in polite toleration. There is only heaven or hell, paradise lost or paradise regained. Unless we are progressing towards true human community, we are as surely sliding towards the abyss. The saving grace, and I use the words in their strictest possible meaning, is that it will not be in the end a matter of human achievement and accomplishment. All we can do is be open to the God-given opportunities for creating human community that history has provided and the future will offer. This article is entitled "A Sense of Community." For us -- and for Ireland -- community makes sense.

Biographical Material

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organisation and its impact on Christian life. He has been a secondary teacher of religion in both Ireland and Northern Ireland, and now is principally concerned with the education of teachers.

i "There is one element, however, which can be found in all of the concepts, and (if its mention seems obvious) it is specified merely to facilitate a positive delineation of the degree of heterogeneity: all of the definitions deal with people. Beyond this common basis, there is no agreement." From George A. Hillery Jr. "Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement" *Rural Sociology*. 20., 1955 cited in Bell, Colin and Newby, Howard *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community* (NY: Praeger, 1972) p 27

ii Williams, Raymond *Keywords : A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976) p. 65

iii Sacks, Jonathan *The Persistence of Faith : Religion, Morality , and Society in a Secular Age* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991)

iv Sacks, Jonathan *The Persistence of Faith* p 89.

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- v Sacks, Jonathan *Persistence of Faith* p 89.
- vi Sacks, Jonathan *Persistence of Faith* p 45.
- vii Bellah, Robert et al *Habits of the Heart: Middle America Observed* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Uni. of California Press 1985)
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- xvii Selznick, Philip *The Moral Commonwealth* p 363.
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- xxiv Bellah, Robert et al. *The Good Society* (NY: Random 1992) p 10-11
- xxv Today's *Irish Times* has an article by Fintan O Toole which amounts to saying that the Church should refrain from comment and abjure moral authority on issues which are offered for referendum. "Catholic Right has no interest in debate on divorce" (*Irish Times* 1/9/95 p 14)
- xxvi From Abrams, M., Gerard, D., and Timms, N. (Editors) *Values and Social Change in Britain: Studies in the Contemporary Values of Modern Society* (London: Macmillan 1985) p 220 quoted in Gill, Robin *Moral Communities: The Prideaux Lectures for 1992* (Exeter: Uni of Exeter Press, 1992) p. 20