



FAITH FOCUS -

Easter events shape the island but an older Easter story gives us hope

We are a people of proclamation and covenant. The Ulster Covenant and the Easter Proclamation were crucial to the formation of the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. But the critical role of Christianity in Ireland means that proclamation and covenant play a deeper role in this island, writes Peter Lynas

We are a people shaped by Easter. Easter was very important in the story of St Patrick, and Patrick is important to Ireland, sharing the Christian heritage of this island.

The Easter Rising and the Good Friday Agreement mean that Easter continues to shape this island.

But it is a much older story of Easter that provides hope for this place. The story of the

cross, of scandalous reconciliation and offensive grace, provides the foundation for and sustains the transformation needed in building a restored society.

A restored society in which people know their identity and honour the other. One in which relationships can flourish. Such a society is aware and respectful of its history, but defined by something more.

The Easter story is the story of reconciliation which makes all other reconciliation possible.

The Attorney General recently grabbed the headlines in this paper for comments made in the 100: Our Story of Healing, Honour & Hope a one-off magazine produced by the Evangelical Alliance.

He argued that the Rising was profoundly wrong and could not be justified. But he also said, “Reconciliation is virtually impossible, save in theological terms. I don’t think reconciliation is possible unless the divine command to forgive is acknowledged... In our context, reconciliation is incomprehensible in other-than-Christian terms.”

In all the talk of suffering and sacrifice, we need to see healing sweep across our land this Easter.

As different groups contest parts of the story of this land, we will work towards honour and grace-filled conversations in the present. Finally, we pray for heavenly solutions and stories of hope that will change a nation; for true reconciliation is found in Jesus in whom all the broken and dislocated pieces get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies.

The theologian Jurgen Moltman defines biblical hope in this way, “Genuine hope is not blind optimism. It is hope with open eyes, which sees the suffering and yet believes in the future.”

There is an integrity and robustness to the ‘genuine hope’ the Bible espouses.

A ‘hope with open eyes’ is a hope that never invalidates the suffering we are experiencing, but rather encourages us to ‘pray it’ with all the emotion and pain it carries, consequently bringing us through and helping us see beyond it.

The Bible writers capture the holy tension of the wounded and wonderful essence of life on this earth. Their language gives us permission to grieve our sorrow and pain, yet they won’t allow us to stay there, for theirs is the language of Easter. They enter into our pain yet call us beyond it by reminding us not just of a future

hope but how that hopeful future rushes into the present recapitulating everything broken, reversing the curse, cascading with life, making all things beautiful.

Dostoevsky reminds us that to live without hope is to cease to live, because hope drive out fear. Tom Wright puts it like this, “Easter was when Hope in person surprised the whole world by coming forward from the future into the present.”

This is our hope for Northern Ireland this Easter.

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