

FACILITATED DIALOGUE: THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF FR ALEC REID

C. K. Martin Chung¹



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'The Word has become flesh in the conflict in Northern Ireland and lives in the midst of it.' –Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R. (2017d, 145)

Abstract

This essay analyses the 'peace ministry' of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R. (1931–2013), who was instrumental in the 1980s and early 1990s in the Northern Ireland peace process especially in fostering dialogues within the nationalist community. It seeks to account for Reid's political theology by way of contextualising his words and deeds in the wider European theological landscape of his time, with special reference to the 'new political theology' of Johann Baptist Metz and Catholic Social Teaching.

The argument is that, although elements of Reid's political theology of facilitated dialogue can be traced variously to post-Vatican II theological developments in the Catholic Church, the Redemptorist tradition, and theological reflections by his contemporaries in Northern Ireland, his unusual emphasis on the interventionist role of the Church in a 'conflict situation' can only be explained by his deep concern for the 'next-victim-as-neighbour', which in turn seems to have arisen from the 'inappropriate guilt' he felt for the victims of republican violence.

KEYWORDS: *Alec Reid, Northern Ireland, political theology, dialogue, conflict resolution*

Introduction

For those who have some knowledge of the Northern Ireland peace process, which brought the modern Troubles to a close in 1998, the name Alec Reid would not be unfamiliar. Neither a politician nor somebody in a position of power, the Irish Redemptorist priest has been credited by historians and political scientists alike for having played – among others – an indispensable role in paving the way for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) ceasefire in 1994, which in turn straightened the path for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998 (Sandal 2017, 94; English 2003, 264–285). By creating out of practically nothing an intra-nationalist dialogue in the 1980s and

1. C. K. Martin Chung, Assistant Professor, Department of Government and International Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong; Visiting Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Ethnic Conflict, Queen's University Belfast, UK. Correspondence: ckmartin@hkbu.edu.hk. This work was supported by the Research Grants Council, University Grants Committee, Hong Kong (project no.: 22612318).

1990s among constitutional nationalism, Irish republicanism and the Irish state,² the Clonard sagart [Ed: Irish word for priest] has earned a well-deserved place in the history of not only the north of Ireland but the island as a whole and Irish-British relations (Ryder 2013).

Much as the peacebuilding efforts of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R. (1931–2013) have been documented and appreciated, his ‘peace ministry’ has been much less analysed and understood – until recently. The fact is, Reid was more of a peace practitioner rather than a peace preacher, working behind the scenes most of the time and preferring others to be shone the limelight. Hence his own conceptualisation of his political activities as pastoral in nature and himself as ‘an agent of the Holy Spirit’ in a situation of human conflict has been given much less clarification (and attention) than the ‘peace philosophy’ of his contemporaries (e.g. Hume, Fraser and Murray 2013). With Martin McKeever’s ‘One Man, One God’ (2017), a major gap in the theological history of the Troubles is filled. While unreservedly acknowledging this work by a fellow Redemptorist as the primary gateway to Reid’s life and thinking, the present essay seeks to outline in a much shorter format the political theology of without doubt one of Northern Ireland’s greatest Catholic peacemakers.

By ‘political theology’ it is meant here broadly the ‘theological reflection on the concrete political practice of Christianity’ (Moltmann 2015: 14). With political reconciliation it is useful to adopt a theological analytical approach to make understandable the ‘reasoning’ of religious or religiously-based actors, which often overwhelms self-interest-driven and instrumentalist paradigms (Smyth 2005; Pruitt 2008). In particular, we shall focus on the scriptural basis of Reid’s political theology, the particular formulations he employed to explicate his thoughts, and the wider theological contexts – the Catholic European Zeitgeist, the Redemptorist tradition³ and the contemporary inter- and intra-church dialogues in Northern Ireland – in which the word of Reid ‘happened’.

As we shall see, the Irish Redemptorist was no ‘systemic’ political theologian creating vast systems of thought capable of answering each and every political question. He was rather an ‘ordinary priest’ literally caught up in crossfire who responded in a politically impactful way – the way of ‘facilitated dialogue’ – based on a certain theological foundation. It is to the description of this foundation that this article is dedicated with the aim to provoke discussion and emulation.

2. Following convention in the literature, ‘nationalism’, ‘unionism’, ‘republicanism’ and ‘loyalism’ in lower case refer to their respective political ideologies/convictions, whereas the same in upper case refer to particular party or organisational identities.

3. According to Fr Michael Kelleher C.Ss.R. (2020), Reid ‘followed in the footsteps’ of another Irish Redemptorist peacemaker, Archbishop Patrick Clune (1864–1935), who is known for his role in the (unsuccessful) negotiation between London and Sinn Féin in the early 1920s. Among contemporary Redemptorists, Fr Sean O’Riordan (1916–1998) – as a leading moral theologian of his generation – was ‘especially significant’ for Reid. Furthermore, the Redemptorists have been active not only in Northern Ireland but also in other conflict ‘hotspots’ such as Mindanao in southern Philippines. A Filipino missionary once told the author that they are sometimes jokingly called the ‘Redeem-terrorists’.

The theological contexts of 'facilitated dialogue'

Alec Reid was 18 when he joined the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in 1949, which was founded by St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696–1787). The post-World War II period was one of epochal changes inside the Catholic Church. By the time Reid got involved in one of his first significant 'dialogical interventions' in the mid-1970s – that is, to resolve an intra-republican dispute (McKeever 2017, 23; Adams 2018, 256–257) – the Church had already experienced (if not quite begun to digest the full implications of) the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which inaugurated the long process of renewal within the Church.

The Redemptorists contributed to this process. Among the more prominent of these was Bernhard Häring C.Ss.R. (1912–1998), a moral theologian famous for his 'Das Gesetz Christi' (The Law of Christ), who brought the Alphonsian influence to bear on one of the key documents of Vatican II – 'Gaudium et spes' (GS), or the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (McDonough 1997). A couple of passages from this document, which counts also among the foundational texts of Catholic Social Teaching (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2005), would later find real-life application by Reid in the Troubles. From seeking to understand the 'ways of thinking' of those who 'think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters' (GS 28), to the necessary differentiation between 'error' and the 'person in error', the Clonard priest would exemplify these principles by his own initiatives of intra-nationalist dialogues.⁴

Outside and alongside Vatican II, a 'new political theology' was born in post-war Europe. If 'joy and hope' (the literal meaning of 'Gaudium et spes') were made of more 'positive' and 'lighter' substance, the new 'fundamental theology' that also came to define the post-war Catholic theological landscape was of a darker and heftier origin: Catholic guilt for the Holocaust. In the words of Jürgen Moltmann, one of its chief proponents: 'The New Political Theology emerged in Germany under the shock of Auschwitz' (2015, 8). In their diagnosis, a pattern of Catholic middle-class behaviour partially accounted for why there was so little Christian resistance against the Nazi regime in Europe: the widespread opinion that 'religion is a *private* matter and has nothing to do with public life and politics'. The new political theology sought to correct that (Metz 1977, 31; Moltmann 2015, 9; emphasis added). With Reid's theology of 'facilitated dialogue', we will also see the controversial claim that the Church has a much more *public and political* role to play in the context of violent conflict than most of his contemporaries – though not all – were ready to acknowledge, much less follow suit.

Another leading thinker of the new political theology was the late Johann Baptist Metz

4. With the backing of bishops, superiors and fellow Redemptorists, Reid would be able to tread the thin line between being an independent 'agent of the Holy Spirit' for dialogue and representing the Church hierarchy at the same time, the relationship of which with the republican movement has such a long and difficult history that trust could not simply be assumed to be present, as Reid readily conceded (2017b, 136).

(1928–2019), who counted amongst the significant ‘turners’ who sought to turn post-war Germany away (*umkehren*) from that path that had led to Auschwitz (Chung 2017, 150). It was the Bavarian theologian – whose war experience, like Häring, had informed his theologising (Ashley 2003, 243; O’Riordan 1977, 680) – who attempted to divert the Catholic compassion for the passion of Christ from traditional anti-Judaism in Christianity, to cultivate a heightened sensitivity towards the *suffering of others* – first and foremost the Jewish victims of the Shoah. According to him, Christians are to ‘heed the prophetic call of the stranger’s suffering’ (as Christ’s suffering) and to exercise ‘the freedom to suffer another’s suffering’ (with the freedom of Christ), while the Church is to be the ‘the public memory’ of this suffering and this freedom against all totalitarian systems (Metz 2007, 88–90). ‘The dark prophecy of this suffering of others’ must be heeded if the Church is to hear and to proclaim the word of Christ (2007, 94). In Reid, we would find a heedful practitioner and exponent of this new political theology who was evidently moved to act by the suffering of the last and the next victims of the Troubles regardless of their political colours.

Within Northern Ireland itself, the rising death tolls in the early 1970s and the sporadic but sustained confrontations afterwards also prompted local Christian communities to engage in a prolonged process of collective soul-searching. From the Joint Group on Social Questions (later Irish Inter-Church Meeting, IICM) to the Inter-Church Group on Faith and Politics (ICGFP) and the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI), just to name a few, dialogues among and within churches in the island of Ireland during the Troubles have offered variegated theological answers and solutions.⁵ Among the shared features of these joint reflections is what can be called principled secularism: the conviction that it is not for the churches to offer political blueprints or political programmes to solve the problem of violence, but only moral frameworks within which these programmes can be evaluated (Joint Group on Social Questions 1977, 62; ICGFP 1989a, 4.2.2, 6.11). And while the official inter-church dialogues tended to focus on condemning violence and the analysis of social injustice and social complicity underlying sectarianism (Working Party on Sectarianism 1993), the unofficial and intra-Evangelical ones went further to accuse fellow Christians of having committed ‘idolatry’ ‘in our worship of the gods of nationalism, of loyalism and republicanism’, which was ultimately responsible for the divine punishment in the form of the Troubles (ICGFP 1989b, VII; ECONI 1998, 24). One can readily discern the ‘prophetic’ approach in these collective reflections in which scathing critique and self-critique against oppression and false worship were the main motifs. This stands in sharp contrast – though not necessarily in opposition – to the ‘pastoral’ approach that Fr Alec Reid undertook to ‘remove the gun forever from the nationalist side of the age-old conflict in Ireland’, as he conceived to be the main objective of his ‘pastoral ministry of peace’ (Reid 2017b, 137).

5. On these various dialogues and initiatives, see Mitchel (2003, 260) and Power (2008).

The political theology of 'facilitated dialogue'

There is little ambiguity as to which biblical role model Reid took for dealing with a conflict situation: 'we can learn from the pastoral example of Jesus Himself... He communicated directly with those whom He wished to influence including people who were condemned by the official Church of the time as the worst of sinners and outlaws' (Reid 2017b, 136). All of the main characteristics of the Redemptorist priest's 'pastoral approach' to peacebuilding flow from this single image of Jesus dialoguing with sinners (Mt 9:10–13).

To begin with, a Christian who wants to serve for peace 'in a conflict situation' must not satisfy herself with 'pulpit-type condemnations' (Reid 2017b, 136) of violence and political idolatry,⁶ but get down to the 'flesh-and-blood reality' of the conflict itself (2017d, 141). 'The serving Christian must stand in the middle of the conflict and encounter it in all its flesh-and-blood reality until he comes to understand it with the knowledge of direct, personal, front-line experience,' which will then enable him to 'identify the moral dimensions of good and evil which are involved in causing and driving the conflict' (2017d, 139). The 'crucial scriptural guideline' for Christian peacemakers, therefore, according to Reid, is a beginning verse in the Gospel according to John: 'The Word was made flesh and lived amongst us' (1:14a).

To be the 'pastoral agent of the Holy Spirit' (Reid 2017d, 139) *already* in a conflict – that is, not just talking about it or theorizing on it – is to be somebody who can use her companionship to change political behaviour. 'Jesus used companionship as a means of exercising His pastoral influence and leadership' (2017d, 141). The image of Jesus as 'the companion of all kinds of sinners' (2017b, 136; 2017d, 142) thus has 'crucial significance for the role of the Christian in a situation of conflict' (2017d, 141).

Hence echoing the biblical distinction between 'sin' and the 'sinner' (Genesis 4:7) reiterated in 'Gaudium et spes', the Redemptorist dialogue-initiator took those to task who objected to dialogues with terrorists on moral grounds: 'The Christian, therefore, cannot say: "There are some people in this conflict with whom I will not associate because I regard them as sinful participants", since to do so would clearly contradict the example of Jesus' (Reid 2017d, 143). Rather, opportunities for communication must be taken – and created, if they are not readily available – for the transformation of behaviour and mindset.

The pastoral ministry of peace is thus 'essentially a ministry of communication' (Reid 2017d, 144). And because of her 'pastoral responsibility', the Church must 'use her resources, her influence and her lines of communication to encourage, promote and, when necessary, even to facilitate' dialogues to resolve political conflicts (2017c, 132).

6. It is obvious that Reid also took note of the idolatry and secularising tendencies (2017b, 135). But this line of thought is not emphasised and followed through in his 'pastoral approach', in contrast to the 'prophetic approach' of the ICGFP and ECONI.

'Pastoral' because there are 'moral and humanitarian issues' at stake (2017c, 131). In other words, in such a situation, religious intervention in politics in the form of creation and organisation of 'forbidden dialogues' is not going beyond the remit of the Church but part of her Christlike mission.

On the practical side, the Church-as-facilitator can offer a political 'vicarious sacrifice', so to speak, to take the blame for the scandalous dialogue between political opposites such as elected politicians and 'terrorists': the Church can 'provide the kind of sanctuary setting where the parties to the conflict... can meet together for the necessary dialogue without damaging their own political or moral credibility and without compromising or appearing to compromise any of their own democratic principles' (Reid 2017c, 132). Hence when ECONI was admonishing fellow Evangelicals in 1988 to do repentance as essentially a face-losing exercise in order to 'become a community of hope' in a conflict situation (1998, 24), Reid's pastoral approach was trying to offer a face-saving sanctuary for constitutional nationalists and republicans to hold 'necessary dialogues' for peace.⁷

The facilitator must also not be content with having hosted and witnessed difficult dialogues – which often fail to go beyond the setting out of well-known differences, as the initial talks between SDLP and Sinn Féin showed (Mansergh 2019, 106) – but work to make sure that there are concrete answers and solutions coming out of them. As it were, discipleship sometimes also means providing people with a *solution* to their problems, not just setting the scene for them to find it themselves (Mt 14:15–16). And here Reid brought to bear his own insight of the republican mindset, which he had both inherited (from his mother's side) and earned during his long ministry with republican prisoners (McKeever 2017, 19–22).

I am convinced... that the republican movement will not be persuaded to give up its armed strategy for a political strategy unless it has first been satisfied that such a strategy would be organized enough and strong enough to pursue effectively the broad thrust of the traditional aims of Irish nationalism in the political setting of the 1990s (Reid 2017b, 137).⁸

Because of this conviction, the Redemptorist facilitator would not tire of being a champion of the pan-nationalist 'democratic dynamism', proposed as the non-violent substitute to armed struggle for an alternative constitutional future (Reid 2017e, 152–

7. Whether the face-saving device was effective or not is another question. John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), for instance, was no stranger to media attacks due to his engagement in talks with Republicans (English 2003, 333; McKittrick and McVea 2012).

8. Once again, the pastoral approach of Reid's took a different route to the problem of mutually exclusive political ideologies. Nationalism – and by extension unionism – is not condemned out of hand as idolatrous, but considered as legitimate in itself, only needing a non-violent political strategy, not an armed one. In hindsight, one can say that such a recognition belongs to the foundation on which the GFA was built. Whether the moral 'minimalism' (all priorities can remain intact as long as violence is out) in such an approach has become an obstacle to political reconciliation in the post-GFA period is another question.

153).⁹ Such a ‘consensus strategy’ agreed by SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Irish Government, which formed the basis of the IRA ceasefire of 1994 (2017e, 149), was only achieved after years of ‘facilitated dialogues’, in which Reid served as witness and messenger (Reid 2017e, 162; Mansergh 2019, 108), as he did in that iconic moment of the Troubles when the priest was photographed administering the last rites to two British Army corporals killed in the fateful March of 1988 (Scull 2019, 150).¹⁰

Accounting for the political theology of ‘facilitated dialogue’

Witnessing others’ victimhood is one thing, recognising one’s *personal* guilt in it is another, much less the theological reflection on what a Christian should do *politically* about that guilt. Fr Alec Reid seemed to have gone through this path to his political theology of facilitated dialogue. McKeever highlights a ‘moving account of his decision to engage’ more politically, in which we have ‘probably the most intimate statement’ of Reid on his personal motivation:

So I went along one night to a wake in a house in the Clonard area ... it was the wake of an innocent nationalist who was shot by the loyalists ... I was kneeling down saying the rosary with them, and the next thing this woman ... went over to the coffin and she started to caoineadh [to keen] ... then I remember thinking I have to do something about this (McKeever 2017, 29).

That a Catholic priest felt moved by the mourning for a nationalist victim of loyalist violence in Northern Ireland is not remarkable. What is remarkable is that the thought of ‘needing to do something about it’ ended up as facilitating an intra-nationalist dialogue to end republican violence. If one wanted to do something about nationalist victimhood, why not do something to end loyalist violence or ‘state violence and injustice’ – as supporters of liberation theology in Northern Ireland argued (McVeigh 1999, 3)? Or at least one should facilitate an inter-communal dialogue to end violence on both sides instead of singling out ‘the nationalist gun’ in the conflict equation.

To answer this question, the author borrows an insight from Revd Harold Good, the Methodist counterpart of Reid as independent witnesses to IRA decommissioning in 2005 (Walsh 2017, 67). According to McKeever, Reid repeatedly expressed during the interviews ‘regret about what he should have done’, which Good characterised as ‘inappropriate guilt’ (McKeever 2017, 199, n. 31).¹¹ What could have instilled a sense

9. According to Martin Mansergh, special advisor to successive Taoisigh and participant in the secret dialogues, Reid was no mere spectator of the discussions, but was also ‘indefatigable in drawing up position papers’, including drafts of the British-Irish joint statement (2019, 106).

10. Reid was carrying a ‘Sinn Féin paper for the SDLP’ that day when that happened (McKeever 2017, 33–35).

11. Inappropriate insofar as a juridical or psychoanalytical concept of guilt is applied, according to which the Redemptorist pastor was certainly innocent or unnecessarily ‘burdened’. But if the concepts of ‘guilt contexts’ (*Schuldzusammenhänge*) or ‘structures of sin’ are applied, which the Catholic Social Teaching propagates (see for instance John Paul II (1987, 36)) and which the IICM’s conception of the ‘sectarian pyramid’ accentuates (Working Party on Sectarianism 1993, 23), then Reid’s sense of ‘omission’ could only be a manifestation of this guilt awareness (*Schuldbewusstsein*). His choice of the biblical word *caoineadh* (Mt 11:17; An Bíobla Naofa 1981) points to this awareness.

of guilt in the Clonard priest can be glimpsed from his letter (dated 19 May 1986) to John Hume, leader of SDLP, inviting him to consider the proposals to establish SDLP-Sinn Féin dialogues under Church auspices. In the first part of this letter explaining his personal motivation, Reid wrote:

My only aim is to help those people who, if the present situation continues, will be killed, injured or imprisoned over the next few weeks and months... it was the death of a UDR [Ulster Defence Regiment] man in South Armagh about two and a half years ago that sparked off the efforts which my colleagues and I have been making since then to end, once and for all, the violent situation which is causing such tragedies (Reid 2017a, 113).

That 'UDR man' could very well be Thomas Cochrane, who was kidnapped and then killed in South Armagh in October 1982. Reid had accompanied an IRA member to the location to save the victim but they were too late (McKeever 2017, 27–28; Scull 2019, 123). The fact that Reid cited – of all possible victims of sectarian violence – the example of a victim-other, or a victim who belongs to the other community rather than one's own – in his letter to persuade a *nationalist* leader 'doesn't make sense' at first glance. Shouldn't he have used an example of a nationalist victim – like the one and many others whose wake he had attended – in order to be more politically persuasive? But he didn't. He chose to be silent on the death of Joseph Donegan, a fellow Catholic, who had been killed in a related kidnapping by loyalists in the same October (Scull 2019, 123). Instead, he insisted to his nationalist letter addressee that 'it was only when the UDR man ... was killed and I felt that the Church and priests like myself could and should be playing a more active and effective role in ending this kind of tragedy' (Reid 2017a, 113).¹²

The political theologian is not a politician. It is not about scoring political points by representing political interests or playing into sectarian hatred. The sagart proceeded from an acute sense of guilt as a Catholic pastor who had born witness to the *victimhood of the other*, who had been killed – by all likelihood he knew – by another Catholic 'faithful in every other way' (Reid 2017b, 135). That is why the goal was to end political violence from the nationalist side, and the means was an intra-nationalist dialogue to convince republicans of a viable political alternative to their 'military dynamism'. Reading back this way, it all makes sense, for the victimhood of the other was the 'trigger' of Fr Alec Reid's decisive peace ministry and political theology of facilitated dialogue. As he recounted telling Gerry Adams – president of Sinn Féin – bluntly to his face before it all began: 'our objective was to stop people being killed and our *first* objective was to stop our people killing, that was the IRA' (McKeever 2017, 30; emphasis added).

12. It could have been a simple case of political inaptitude on the part of the priest, but it seems implausible, for elsewhere in the letter, Reid took great care in picking materials to support his pro-dialogue proposal to Hume. For instance, he inserted lengthy excerpts from Fr O'Riordan's comments on Gerry Adams' open letter to Bishop Cahal (later Cardinal) Daly (Reid 2017a, 119–123). But he included only those positive comments that gave the impression that Adams was an open-minded dialogue partner with a valid question for the critics of republican violence, while leaving out the much more critical (and substantial) comments as 'not really relevant' (Reid 2017a, 122; O'Riordan Undated).

Metz could not have reformulated his 'memoria passionis' better than Reid did for Northern Ireland: 'I don't belong to any political party, but I represent the next person who is going to be killed in the Troubles. The church has a moral obligation to get stuck in when people are suffering and to try and stop it' (Crutchley 2014). The difference is only that being a member of the oppressed minority to and from whom a two-way 'trail of suffering' (Metz 2007, 94) had been laid, and with a love that raises the stranger, the Redemptorist opted to shun the path of prophetic protest against the iniquities of a state that was not his. His late outburst comparing Catholic suffering under unionism with Jewish suffering under Nazism was an aberration indeed (BBC News 2005)!

Conclusion: The relevance of Reid's political theology for conflict resolution

Aberration aside, Fr Alec Reid's political theology of facilitated dialogue still has much to offer peacemakers of today. It is not a grand scheme from which answers to all important questions about the relationship between faith and politics can be expected; it only seeks to provide a concrete blueprint for what a Christian and the Church as a whole should and can do in a situation of conflict. The answer it offers – that the Church should play an interventionist role to create and facilitate political dialogues when mutual mistrust is rendering these impossible without intervention – may prove satisfactory for some and disappointing for others, e.g. those who prefer 'liberation' to 'dialogue' on the one side and those who yearn to see the Church do more for justice for the victims of republican violence on the other.

It also flies in the face of political 'solutions' that are, in one way or another, based on the internal 'division' of the conflicting parties, whether it is the age-old 'divide and rule' tactic or the modern, centrifugal variant of consociational power-sharing (McGarry and O'Leary 2017), which is characterised by the intra- instead of inter-bloc competition for votes. In the author's own political context of Hong Kong, there has never been lack of voices calling for the 'split up' (割席) of – to borrow from Northern Ireland's political lexicon – constitutional democrats and 'physical force' democrats, both of whom aim to democratise Hong Kong (within or, if not possible, then without Mainland China). The local Catholic Church has been heavily criticised for 'walking too closely' with 'physical force' democrats and failed to condemn not only violence but the violent protesters themselves. The logic of such divisive stratagem is that separation weakens the support for and hence resolve of the 'physical force' wing of the democracy movement, and the problem of political violence will eventually fade away as a result.

The political theology of facilitated dialogue, however, which grew organically from Fr Alec Reid's multiple *intra* dialogue initiatives, points to a different path, a path that avoids the risk of further political radicalisation due to isolation. Without realising it perhaps, Reid practiced what the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) now calls the 'Binding, Bonding, Bridging' (A3B) method of conflict resolution, which advocates as the first step the healing of individual traumas (binding), then strengthening understanding

within identity groups (bonding), before fostering dialogues and developing trust between opposing camps (bridging). First adopted in southern Philippines to resolve the land conflicts among Muslim, indigenous, and Christian inhabitants in the early 2010s, the 'A3B' model has also been proven effective elsewhere, such as in the Central African Republic (CRS 2017, 3–7). The strength of such an approach is its ability to tap into the *internal* resources for conflict resolution in each opposing group and 'its capacity to awaken and engage traditional and religious leaders to become community peace facilitators' (2017, 4). With the example of facilitated dialogues by Reid *bonding* Irish nationalists before the *bridging* of unionists and nationalists culminating in the eventual conclusion of the GFA in 1998, one can argue that this 'cohesive' rather than divisive approach to resolve conflicts seems to have worked in Northern Ireland as well – and first among others.

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