

DRAFT Background Paper for Working Group 3:

ETHNICITY AND RELIGION

By Helen Watson and Jack Boag

THE two sections of this paper are intended to initiate the discussion. They approach the subject of ethnic-religious wars in very different ways. Part A, by an anthropologist, focuses attention on the need to understand the multiple meanings of the terms conventionally used (ethnicity, religion, conflict, etc,) in discussing this subject. Such considerations affect the validity of any conclusions that may be drawn from a study of particular instances of conflict. Part B, by a layman with a special interest in East Europe, describes some instances of long-standing ethnic-religious conflict in which successful reconciliation appears to have been achieved, and attempts to draw some conclusions. Finally, other approaches such as The Parliament of World Religions are discussed briefly.

PART A

By Helen Watson

Preface

IF religion is considered as a creation of society which expresses and reinforces social solidarity, religious beliefs are in a sense a metaphor for society and a reflection of social structure. This Durkheimian view of religion implies the impact of religion in defining and maintaining the boundaries of any community of believers by expressing the sacred nature of social obligation and cohesion. The parts religion can come to play in situations of conflict directly derive from this identity-forming, cohesion-building aspect of collective belief.

Religion has been much cited as a central element of numerous cases of the conflicts which seem to have characterised late twentieth century struggles for territorial sovereignty, political autonomy and access to resources. However, there is no simple pattern or single model of what has come to be known as religious violence or religious nationalism. The terms are often used interchangeably with that other common-sense shorthand phrase "ethnic conflict." For many commentators, when wars are described as "religious" or "ethnic" this serves both

to imply the irrational and incomprehensible bases of the conflict, and represent the beliefs and actions of participants as alien, backward or primitive. Ironically a homogenising label of convenience like religious/ethnic conflict simultaneously masks the complexities of the social and cultural processes at work, and limits our capacity to understand the communities' experience of violence and suffering, either in universal terms, or as something we, in our own society might, one day experience.

My primary focus on ethnicity relates centrally to the problem of the labels and categories used to describe inter-communal conflict. Where religion matters most in this context is in respect of people's interest in maintaining or defending boundaries between themselves and others. Collective identity, like a tapestry of cultural threads, is woven out of perceptions of shared ancestry, common interest, outlook, culture and needs. Each "thread" in weft and warp is taken to demonstrate unambiguous evidence of difference. Typically the social dimensions of religion; the ways in which people use religion as a badge of identity to define themselves versus others, operate with the same force and effect as other factors of ethnic differentiation (such as language) in creating discrete social categories.

In this respect in situations of inter-communal conflict it seems less important to differentiate between the religious and other elements used in the construction of social division than to recognise the potential negative impacts of a community's strong symbolic and pragmatic attachment to notions of "us" and "them". This is not to deny the powerful force of religion in relation to how it can be used to fuel phases of hostility, sustain division, legitimate causes, motivate fighters and demonise enemies within society. But even when conflict is waged explicitly under the banner of "holy war" in the name of any god or gods, there are many other core elements at work in the warring groups' construction of an unambiguous sense of collective identity and shared past, present and future. Here, it is the more general belief in exclusive and immutable difference between peoples which must be understood as the critical socio-cultural issue. It is also the starting point for recognising the problem of ethnicity.

The Problem of Ethnicity

A key issue in debates about social and cultural perspectives on conflict is how the bases of and for hostility can be understood as they are expressed locally. The possibility of eliminating the causes of war, and securing agreement or reconciliation between warring factions depends on first understanding what any war or conflict is "about" for the peoples involved directly or indirectly in the cycle of conflict. Most crucially, what it requires is an understanding of the conflict's historical and cultural roots, and the aims, means and ideologies of warfare for the communities concerned. This is not as simple or straightforward as it sounds.

What is necessary here is to confront the hard facts behind the commonplace cliché that my heroic liberation struggle may be your oppressive guerrilla war. There are always at least two opposing and contested accounts of what a war is about at both local and trans-national level. The picture becomes more complex when issues of audience and observer, and the relationship between insider and outsider perspectives and understandings are introduced into the analytical frame. Moreover, it is difficult, arguably impossible, and intellectually dishonest, for description and analysis to side-step the debates about which side in any war occupies the legitimate moral or political high ground. Addressing questions about what war is “about” for the communities concerned involves asking how and why notions of difference are constructed.

At some fundamental level, even the most coldly analytical and objective attempt to understand the nature of war will be drawn into a narrative of legitimacy which echoes one of the alternative intra-communal positions on “good versus evil” which justify and explain the bases of and for the conflict itself. In this respect, particularly in the conflicts we treat as “ethnic,” this raises a difficult problem which blurs our often taken-for-granted assumptions about the importance of maintaining distinctions between the objective and subjective, the rational and irrational.

The problems of understanding socio-cultural dimensions of war are multiplied in the case of conflicts described as “ethnic” where the local explanatory models offered to explain, justify or maintain hostilities are constructed around contested and contradictory notions of personal and social identity. The specific problem is that local expressions of what an ethnic conflict are about invoke a range of discrete but essentialist notions of difference where the perception of what it is that divides “us” from “them” becomes perceived as permanent, fixed and immutable. This is the bedrock from which everyday violence initially emerges. Over time, the physical and symbolic boundaries dividing communities in conflict may become reinforced by successive waves of cross-communal violence. If we seek to understand ethnic conflicts, attention must be given the complex relationship between the warring factions' exclusive sense of collective identity and their mutually opposed explanations and legitimising accounts of the roots and *raison d'être* of the necessity or inevitability of violence.

At the heart of these cross-cultural generalisations about the problems of understanding ethnically-related cases of conflict lies the problematic concept of ethnicity in terms of its meaning and significance as an analytical and descriptive tool. “Ethnicity” covers a wide and fluid variety of notions and experiences. On one level, an expression of ethnic group identity is made up of many diverse factors, constructed from cultural elements which can be placed on a wide spectrum ranging from apparently objective markers to more obviously subjective identifications of varying salience and intensity. The variety of markers of difference in use has prompted theories which distinguish between an “ethnic

group” or category , one defined by cultural markers such as language, dialect, dress, custom , or religion; and “ethnic community”, in which markers consciously serve internal cohesion and differentiation from other groups. However, such a simple distinction is deceptive and misleading.

Although an excursion into the domain of social theories of ethnicity may seem a trivial exercise, far removed from the brutal realities of violence enacted in the name of ethnic difference, but it is an important exercise. The relevance lies in the argument that when ethnicity is discussed within society because popular usage and understanding is often marred by many of the same confusions which can be detected in the original academic definitions and debates. Although the frequency with which the terms ethnic and ethnicity are used might suggest that they are deeply-rooted in popular anglo-phone consciousness, their actual intellectual history is relatively short. The term ethnic only began to emerge with regularity in the mid 1970s in the context of debates about race, nationalism, multi-culturalism and social conflict. Surveying the uses of the term over the past three decades, two basic approaches to theories and definitions of ethnicity can be identified which have important influences on how the term is used and understood.

In crude terms what has become known as primordialist theories of ethnicity define ethnic difference in relation to social structure and the form and features of a given society's cultural morphology. Such theories emphasise the existence of a tangible foundation to ethnic identification based on a deep and permanent “primordial” attachment to a group or culture. The bases of ethnicity are seen to lie in what is objectively “real” and observable. Factors often presented in this light might include a community's racial, religious and linguistic characteristics. The implication of such an approach is that ethnicity is an immutable fact, rooted in biological phenomena and/or cultural products, values and practices. Such basic elements of identity are represented as permanent, defined through and embedded in the objective structure of society. A central argument in this context is that ethnic groups are, or are like, extended kinship groups based on descent. As such, an ethnic group will operate as quasi kinship group in terms of timeless intra-group attachments which are further reinforced by “natural loyalty” or a sense of mutual-obligation, trust, and similarity of collective purpose. Here, the kinship analogy also creates assumptions about the important influences of shared history and outlook, and a community's perception of the force of enduring common ties and interests which extend from the past into present and future.

The alternative position, usually termed instrumentalist, places primary emphasis on ethnicity as a socially created and culturally constructed phenomenon. Most often ethnicity is viewed in relation to a deliberate pursuit of some strategic objective in the context of individual and collective self-interest. A central argument is that ethnicity offers a valuable strategy for securing power, advantage and access to resources. The cultural forms, social characteristics, values and practices of ethnic groups are considered as little more than strategic resources

open to manipulation by existing or would-be political elites. Instrumentalist approaches examine the various ways in which cultural characteristics and practices become symbolic reference points for the ethnic identification of the members of a group versus other communities. In this regard, other communities, whether viewed as ethnic or not, are actual or potential competitors or enemies in the same struggle for advantage. Ethnic identity, constructed on the basis of historical or political myths, is considered as a collective reaction to a community's political position whether that might be one of dominance under threat, or one of resistance to enforced marginality. Whenever ethnicity matters in any social context, in the sense of being given significance and predominance by the communities concerned, it is viewed as a deliberate and calculated political creation. Such theories treat ethnicity and the claims of ethnic groups as wholly instrumental and utilitarian products of power struggles. In short, ethnicity is regarded as a kind of weapon. By implication, ethnicity depends on a kind of collective fictional definition of group identity, rooted in a people's imagination, rather than objective reality.

Obviously the two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Aspects of the different theoretical perspectives and definitions converge in contemporary arguments which recognise and treat as analytically significant all elements used in the constructions of ethnic differentiation. This more valuable, if necessarily complicating perspective on ethnic difference borrows something from both primordialist and instrumentalist arguments. What has been called a constructivist approach to ethnicity stresses how ethnicity involves groups establishing and maintaining boundaries through a mix of objective and subjective markers of difference. Ethnicity tends to be viewed as a form of social organisation maintained by inter-group boundary mechanisms which are based on manipulations of a notion of shared identity in different situations and contexts. If ethnicity allows for the classification of people in terms of their most inclusive sense of what is common or shared, emphasis is placed on characteristics, presumed to be determined by or associated with a community's socio-cultural background which people use to differentiate themselves from others.

A general problem is that we are considering a phenomenon that has many fluid and dynamic elements. There is no simple model or pattern which can be devised to cover the multiple ways in which human societies deal with issues of cultural similarity and difference. The range of features or characteristics taken to define collective ethnicity cannot be assumed to be stable in any particular context or socio-cultural setting. Given the variation over time of the markers of ethnic boundaries, there is equal variation in the particular characteristics or features of cultural difference which are highlighted by members of the group and others. On the surface, the ethnic "label" will remain the same although the way that boundaries are drawn and the significance and meaning attached to markers may shift. The core of the problem here is that the terms of the relationship between

“them” and “us”, and a community's perception of the relevance, importance or status of the relationship is rarely fixed.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that ethnicity does not always matter as a core defining facet of identity for either affective or strategic purposes. Most obviously, ethnicity simply implies the existence of a dynamic relationship between several groups which co-exist in a common area. When collective identities are constructed in any context this involves the dual process of intra-group boundary creation and inter-group boundary maintenance. Eriksen expresses this dualism in terms of a process of dichotomisation and complementarisation. If the former relates to the expression of difference and the latter to expressing similarity, obviously the significance of ethnicity depends on what else is happening at local level. The central features of the process both affect and are affected by the economic and political positions of groups. At the same time the range of internal or local and external or global forces in any context create further unpredictability and instability, especially when ethnic boundaries have become viewed as significant for any ideological or material purpose.

The Greek roots of the term ethnic provide a useful way of understanding the relationship between externally imposed and internally chosen descriptions of ethnic identity in relation to contemporary usage. In the original historical and cultural setting, *ethnos* referred to a nation or people, *ethnikos* to the others, the outsiders, heathens or foreigners. In general terms, *ethnikos*, delineated those considered the “minority” group, whether immigrants, the vanquished or simply those seen as unlike “us”. Here it is significant to note the power relations of the defining process, how the *ethnikos* is actively defined by *ethnos*, the dominant or majority group which views itself as a national (not ethnic) entity. In relation to contemporary usage this has relevance for understanding expressions of inter-community relations in a multi-cultural context. It also has a particular relevance for consideration of the broader implications of the social process of constructing boundaries and divisions between communities presented as permanent, timeless and unambiguous. In such circumstances, where the process evolves against a backdrop of political relations of domination, definitions and defences of ethnic boundaries may become matters of life or death. It is rare that one can identify the precise historical moment when ethnicity becomes politicised and a cultural concern with common ethnic identity shifts into a situation of inter-ethnic polarisation where hostility between communities is enacted in the name of ethnic difference. Here also it is important to recognise the dynamism and instability in the process. The characteristics or factors considered the most telling markers of difference may be transformed in different phases of inter-ethnic hostility and conflict. For instance, in Sri Lanka emphasis was originally placed on language as a key marker of Sinhalese ethnicity, but following the rise of Buddhist agitation, religion became the critical factor defining difference. In Brass's terms, being Buddhist came to automatically imply being Sinhalese. In a similar way, at the same moment in history, antagonism between groups may be described and

understood in different terms. Laber has argued that in Yugoslavia class conflict between rural Serbs and the more affluent urban Sarajevans (the Muslim minority) was transformed into inter-religious conflict via anti-Muslim propaganda from Belgrade. In other respects, the impacts of internal propaganda and external reportage provide related lessons on the problematics of understanding ethnic conflict.

All of these complex and intermeshed issues have a bearing on any attempt to identify and understand causes of war which seem based on ethnicity. In the real world, everyday distinctions based on awareness of *ethnos* or *ethnikos* have faded as “ethnicity” as a term has become embedded in popular language. In Northern Ireland the term has been embraced by both Nationalists and Unionists in public articulation of their separate political agendas. Elsewhere, nationality is often defined in terms of majority ethnicity as in Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh. In each of these particular contexts, religion also has emerged as a salient defining feature of the national ethnic community, with the consequence of adding a further complicated ideological, often sacralised, dimension to bolster each group’s various claims for political territorial sovereignty or control of economic resources.

Consideration of theoretical perspectives on the term ethnicity has cast light on some of the problems of understanding conflict solely in terms of ethnicity. Primordialist and instrumentalist approaches have different implications for how the term is defined and used within society. The central elements of each approach have often been conflated and treated as synonymous, especially when used in public debates by individuals and groups making claims which are rooted in questions about origins, markers of common identity and community divisions. A central issue is that awareness of basic differences in the ways ethnicity is used as a descriptive and analytical category illuminates the powerful vacuum at the heart of the term. Ironically perhaps it is this vacuum of meaning which allows peoples to define ethnicity and its significance in various self-interested ways.

From the perspective of warring parties, the absence of a clear-cut definition of ethnicity is an irrelevance. What is more important is that the “facts” of certain rights, claims and reasons for the conflict can be presented within the community, and to the outside world, as unambiguous and legitimate. In an interesting twist to the arguments here, it seems that issues of ethnicity are most relevant to peoples in conflict only in relation to the negative latent process of justifying and rationalising hostility towards an other party: action is taken against “those others” who are different from “us”. Claims of clear and exclusive distinctiveness involve various terms - our nation, people, race - being used interchangeably in expressions of identity and difference. As categories become blurred in the process, fundamental dichotomies are denied or mystified: cultural factors are presented as natural and biological, social ties are symbolically reinforced by notions of shared blood and common kinship.

At the narrowest social level, the result is that individual responses to acts of violence in the course of conflict are interpreted in a highly emotionally-charged inter-personalised framework. On a practical or strategic level acts of inter-communal violence are thus understood as requiring a direct response in kind which has both structural and symbolic equivalence. In an echo of the kinship-analogy often found in representations of ethnic difference, the process is broadly similar to that of the blood feud or vendetta of lineage-based forms of social organisation. At the same time, at the wider level of action in situations of war, the region or state eventually may be represented and perceived as a kind of meta-family unit of mutual protection and self-defence.

The confusion of analytical categories at the heart of the process is an established pattern, in many cases of inter-ethnic and communal violence. It underpins numerous forms of social prejudice and discrimination often presented in related forms of the organised persecution of “minority” groups. In the classic instance of anti-semitism, at different times Jews have been exclusively defined and described as a race, a religious group and ethnic category despite specific sets of arguments which could be presented to the contrary in each instance. The critical common issue is that all forms of institutionalised hostility towards “others” consistently operate through a combination of exclusive negative stereotypes based on a mix of categorically distinct racial, national, religious, or socio-cultural characteristics. In any situation of inter-communal conflict the process of defining and demarcating “them and us” operates without distinction being made between any of these categories. What matters is that a community considers that demonstrable “facts of difference” exist which can be defined in any number or variety of ways. In such circumstances there is no clear-cut dividing line between notions of race and ethnicity, or nation(-alism) and ethnicity, when they are used in representations of collective identity.

When attention is given to the situation and contextual character of ethnicity it reveals how ethnicity plays a part in structuring relationship between groups, and how it can also serve as a basis for political mobilisation and social stratification. Once ethnic boundaries are recognised as negotiable and dynamic, mercurial and context-dependent, we can see that ethnicity is not a law of nature, but a concept produced, and given value and meaning in social and cultural terms. Above all, when we explore people's force of attachment to ethnic sentiments in contemporary societies, and the reality of actions taken in the name of cultural “difference” which is often labelled “ethnic”, what emerges with problematic frequency especially in situations of conflict, is that such differences are presented as natural, inherited and immutable characteristics.

In some important respects the different analytical and theoretical issues discussed offer a mirror-image of the cocktail of the objective and subjective, or real and symbolic dimensions of ethnicity which operate in situations of inter-communal war and violence. A final issue for consideration here turns on what direct lessons

might be learned by those seeking to understand war from this discussion of the social and cultural dynamics of ethnicity. Contemporary attempts to describe and explain one recent war reveal another problematic aspect of the notion of ethnic conflict itself. Not surprisingly perhaps, according to Banks and Laptoiu the term ethnic was used most frequently in British journalism of the 1990s with reference to Bosnia. Representations of “ethnic cleansing” in the media illustrate some of the dilemmas inherent in categorising any conflict as rooted in “ethnicity”.

Commentary on the “cleansing” element of the phrase referred back to two regionally critical political strands of Second World War experiences: the local Croatian Ustache policy of expelling or cleansing (ciscenje) Serbs, Gypsies, Muslims and others from contested territories, and the wider German Nazi programme of creating a pure (judenrein) Third Reich. Consideration of the meaning and significance of the “ethnic” dimension of the policy and practice raised less straightforward issues. Serious and respected commentators who laudably drew attention to the fact that the different peoples, as Slavs of former Yugoslavia were divided on cultural or religious, (not ethnic) lines, fell into the primordialist trap of implying the existence of “real” and unambiguous markers of ethnicity which must exclude such transient factors as culture or religion. Others who argued that “ethnic cleansing” was first and foremost a military tactic, the subject matter - not a side effect of the war, produced accounts of the conflict in a wholly instrumental light which ignored what were obviously very real divisions between communities. In effect, this brief example reveals the general problem of understanding any conflict in relation to a simplistic notion of ethnicity.

If a community's sense of identity is in Anderson's terms “imagined”, this does not make the boundaries less real in their consequences, especially in situations of inter-communal conflict. Even when attention is drawn to the fact that any explanation of ethnic conflict involves a mix of instrumentalist and primordialist perspectives, is difficult to cut free from the tendency to seek to distinguish “real” versus “imagined”, hence legitimate versus illegitimate community boundaries. If we consider the extent to which the same mix of issues dominate our own responses to and assessments of the rights and wrongs of war and conflict, arguably there are strong grounds for avoiding both description and analysis in relation to ethnic difference.

Once we have addressed the important question of what a war is “about”, and the aims, means and ideologies of conflict for the communities concerned, we may understand that at a basic level, beyond strategic interests and objectives, warring parties operate in terms of multi-dimensional, ambiguous and contested but highly potent notions of difference and division. Inevitably this draws on the same primordialist and instrumentalist mix that confuses and constrains any search for practical solutions. While any instance of conflict between peoples can only be understood in relation to its particular socio-cultural form and historical context, questions about solutions and settlements need to be framed within universal cross-cultural parameters which transcend national or regional interests. The most

dangerous aspect of a notion of ethnic conflict lies in its tendency to prompt particularistic red-herring questions about the existential status of the social and cultural factors used to define the communities in conflict. Not only does this risk replicating or reinforcing the ways in which “ethnic issues” appear in the propaganda and ideologies of conflict, it also distracts attention from more fundamental questions about human social strategies for dealing with difference in terms of global human rights and responsibilities.

PART B

By Jack Boag

Introduction

THE general theme of the Conference being the elimination of the causes of war, this paper presents examples of long-standing ethnic-religious conflicts in which, in our own day, reconciliation between the combatants has proved to be possible and seeks to draw some conclusions from these cases.

“At the most primitive level religions are tribal in character. They reinforce tribal cohesion and mark tribal boundaries, making intermarriage across these boundaries difficult and infrequent. On the other hand, the most widespread religions of our own time emphasise the universal brotherhood of humankind, so one would at first expect religion to be a unifying force in the world. However, in practice, religion has often sharpened the boundaries between ethnic groups and has acted to make marriage across these boundaries more difficult than it otherwise would be. Thus, in practice, religion has often proved to be a divisive force rather than a unifying one.”¹

In the past differences of religion have often been a primary cause of war. In the contemporary Western world, however, religious differences are unlikely to be the initiating cause of conflict but they can still act as powerful contributory factors, as the Balkan conflicts of the past ten years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Northern Ireland situation, to mention but a few examples, clearly illustrate.

It is clear that the historical background and local circumstances of conflicts often classed as ethnic-religious in regions like the Sudan, Indonesia or Rwanda differ so fundamentally from those of conflicts in the West that one cannot expect to find common causes or similar methods of resolving them. Moreover, those mentioned are too recent for any adequate analysis of causes or of long term effects to have been studied. We are likely to learn more about conflict resolution and prevention by taking examples of conflicts that are sufficiently distant in time for the facts to have emerged and in some cases for reconciliation to have been achieved. There are some common features among the recent or ongoing ethnic conflicts listed in [Table 1](#) and it will be worth examining whether methods which have achieved a

reduction in tension, or even complete resolution, in some of these may be applicable to others also.

A very frequent cause of war in the past has been the legacy of hatred and the desire for revenge arising from an earlier conflict in which one participant suffered a humiliating defeat. Military victory never addresses the fundamental causes of conflict and the subsequent peace treaty too often fails to do so either, so that each war sows the seeds of the next one. Any means of successfully reconciling former enemies can therefore make an important contribution to breaking the cycle of recurrent wars. In later paragraphs we consider instances where a religious initiative has started the long process leading, in the end, to successful reconciliation and the reestablishment of political co-operation and mutual respect. These later examples prove that religion *can* perform its proper purpose of healing rather than exacerbating the conflict.

Instead of concentrating solely on the causes of wars it is also useful to study the conditions in which human communities of diverse religious and ethnic composition can live together in peace and harmony. One necessary condition is that they must agree upon and adopt the basic ethical principles that promote harmonious human relationships. The principal world religions already proclaim separate ethical codes and these, indeed, have much in common. The attempt to derive from them all an acceptable Global Ethic and a matching commitment to Global Responsibilities, is the theme of Hans Küng's revival of the idea of a Parliament of the World Religions and this approach is considered towards the end of this paper.

Conflicts involving ethnic and religious factors

ALL the conflicts listed in Table 1 are of long standing, some with roots extending back several centuries, including lengthy dormant periods, while recent outbreaks have been triggered by contemporary events. Differences in religious doctrine are not a primary cause of conflict in any of these examples at the present time although they may have been important at an earlier period and are still kept alive by fundamentalist minorities. Religious affiliation and ethnicity are often closely correlated as, for instance, in the Balkans where, in general, Serbs are Orthodox Christians, Croats are Roman Catholics, Albanians are Muslims. It is therefore seldom possible to separate the effect of the ethnic factor from that of the religious factor in a given conflict.

Table 1:

Examples of some current or recent Ethnic-Religious Conflicts:

Ireland, North vs South, involving also Britain and Eire

Kosovo - the Serb vs Albanian conflict

Czech vs Sudeten-German conflict

Poland vs Germany conflict

Israeli vs Palestinian conflict

Former Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Republic Srpska

Cyprus - Greek vs Turk conflict

Struggle against apartheid in South Africa

The Conflict between Czechs and Germans

OF the examples listed in Table 1 those that are furthest along the road of reconciliation are the Czech vs Sudeten-German conflict, that of Poland vs Germany and the South African struggle against apartheid. In these conflicts terrible crimes against human rights were committed by both parties against their opponents and to an observer it must have seemed hopeless to expect real reconciliation in any foreseeable future. The manner in which it has been achieved in these cases should have something to teach us about conflict resolution in general.

The historical background to the Czech vs Sudeten-German conflict extends, in various forms and intensity, over centuries ([Appendix A](#)). It was reawakened in the 1930's as a result of the welcome given to Nazi propaganda by a large part of the Sudeten-German population. This was followed by the German occupation of the border regions in September 1938, after the Munich conference, and then German occupation of the whole country in March, 1939, and throughout World War II. The oppression of Czechs during the war and the revenge taken on the Sudeten-German population after 1945 are described in [Appendix A](#).

From 1948 until 1989 Czechoslovakia was a communist state and its relations with the West were governed by general Cold War attitudes. Despite the Iron Curtain, however, there were, even in the 1950's, some reciprocal visits by prominent members of the German Confessional Church (EKD) and of the Church of the Czech Brethren (EKBB) which laid the foundation for more formal approaches in later years, culminating in 1996 in a successful agreement between the churches on the historical facts and a joint declaration by the two governments in 1997. An important document, the "Ost Denkschrift" (Memorandum on East Europe) was published by the EKD in 1965 and was widely discussed in Germany. It was

entitled “The situation of the evicted German population and the relationship of the German people to their neighbours in the East” and was addressed primarily to the Sudeten-Germans evicted from their homeland in 1945-46. It is a lengthy document of some 16,000 words. The Ost Denkschrift recognised three essential steps on the path to genuine reconciliation.

1. Establish agreement upon the historical facts.
2. Accept responsibility for the historical events.
3. Only when there is a mutual readiness for reconciliation can it then be achieved.

While ruling out the concept of “collective guilt” the EKD authors insisted that the German people must accept responsibility for the Nazi atrocities committed in their name against the peoples of East Europe during World War II and that these events had extinguished any right of the evicted Sudeten-German population to reclaim their ancestral homeland. This conclusion was hotly disputed at the time in Germany, especially by those who had been evicted, but these three steps were in fact the path that was later followed. It could be argued that there is a step before 1. In the above list, namely a readiness to explore the facts at all, lest this should bring to light matters prejudicial to either or both parties. The movement towards reconciliation -- i.e. engagement with Step 1 -- can be initiated, however, by minority groups or even individuals in either community; in the Czech-German case by individual prominent Christians (e.g. Martin Niemöller) and then their official churches, and the relationships thus created can drive forward the political peace process between governments.

However, it was not until after the cold war ended in 1989, i.e. 44 years after the end of World War II, that Czech and German protestant churches could appoint a joint commission to discuss steps toward reconciliation. At their first meeting the principal decision taken was to go away again and write the history of the conflict as perceived by each side separately. The two “factual” accounts were, of course, so widely different that it took many revisions over a period of several years before they could produce a document that interwove the perceptions of the two sides i.e. incorporated *all* the facts, and brought home to both parties the need to acknowledge the crimes their own side had committed in the struggle. The mere knowledge of some crimes -- especially the savage revenge that some sections of the Czech population took upon the defeated Germans -- had been so well concealed by a policy of silence and denial that they were not known at all to most Czechs in post-war generations. The agreed facts were then published (November 1996) as a permanent record in a joint document with the paragraphs in Czech on one page and in German on the opposite page. The document was entitled “Reconciliation between Czechs and Germans” and a later extended version published in 1998 carried the title “The fence dividing us is broken down”. Discussions between the two Governments had been in progress for some two years and on 21 January, 1997, the Heads of State of both countries -- Helmut Kohl

and Vaclav Havel -- met in Prague and signed a Declaration covering all aspects of their future relationship.

Reconciliation between Poles and Germans

GERMANS and Poles have lived in close contact for more than 1000 years, much of that time in fruitful collaboration despite various prejudices and changing political boundaries. However, the German attack on Poland in 1939 followed by the murder of Jews and the brutal oppression of the Polish population throughout World War II made any idea of reconciliation in the foreseeable future seem an impossible dream. In the immediate post-war years the Polish Government excluded whatever was of German origin or influence and concentrated on rebuilding a unified Polish State within their new frontiers. The Roman Catholic Church likewise, to which some 90% of the population belonged, consolidated its position and succeeded in retaining independent control of its affairs. It was the only truly independent church within the Soviet bloc.

The first tentative steps towards a new relationship with the Germans were taken, as usual, by individuals. In June 1948 the theologian Hans-Joachim Iwand, formerly a leading member of the Confessional Church in East Prussia and himself a refugee, wrote: "Our faith demands that we strive for reconciliation with our Eastern neighbours. We should be less concerned about our eastern frontiers than about the human problem of conflict between Germans and Slavs in that region and about the frightful events of the past decade which have made reconciliation appear almost hopeless." Then, in 1957, an official delegation from the EKD led by Martin Niemöller visited Poland and doors formerly closed were opened. German and Polish protestants were able to meet one another and to discuss the need for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. And then, in November 1965, at the end of the 2nd Vatican Council and in connection with the planned millennial celebrations of the conversion of Poland to Christianity, the Polish Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church took the almost incredible step of inviting their German colleagues to the celebrations. In their letter they began with a comprehensive review of past history and especially of the sufferings of the Polish people at German hands during World War II and they then continued: "...yet in spite of all this, in spite of the hopelessness of our situation, loaded as it is with past events, indeed just because of this situation, Reverend Brothers, we make this plea: Let us try to forget! No arguments, no further cold war, but the beginning of a dialogue....in this most Christian and at the same time very human spirit we stretch out our hands to you, within the ambience of this Council that is ending, we grant you forgiveness and ask you for forgiveness." In their reply the German bishops grasped the outstretched hands "with brotherly respect" and prayed God that never again would hatred separate their hands.

The Ostdenkschrift of the Protestant EKD and the Catholic Bishops' letters were important milestones on the path to German-Polish reconciliation but at first they evoked deep divisions which almost split the Evangelical Church in Germany and caused similar divisions in Catholic circles. However, they initiated the necessary search for the historical truth about the German-Polish conflict during and after World War II and as this truth emerged, they encouraged the acceptance of responsibility by both parties for the historical events. As time passed contacts between Poland and the German Federal Republic (FRG) multiplied and in the 1970's a treaty was signed normalising the relations between the People's Republic of Poland and the FRG. The Polish economic crisis of 1981/82, coinciding with the imposition of martial law by Polish President Jaruzelski, elicited international sympathy for the Polish people and the practical response from Germany was quite outstanding. This led to a new spirit in the relationship between the two peoples.

Reconciliation with Poland's Eastern Neighbours

HAPPILY it is not only war that is contagious. Peace and reconciliation can spread across frontiers too. On the occasion of the Second European Ecumenical Conference in Graz in June 1997 a joint committee of the German Evangelical Church (EKD) and of the Polish Ecumenical Council presented a Report on the part that the churches had played in the reconciliation between Poles and Germans and combined this report with an account of a new Project for reconciliation with Poland's Eastern neighbours, the Ukraine and Belarus. The primary cause of possible future conflict in that region is the proposed eastward extension of the European Union but ethnic and religious factors are deeply involved in the historical roots of these present political tensions. In the Ukraine and Belarus the Uniate Church which follows the Greek Orthodox Rite but accepts the authority of the Vatican is the predominant church. To further the above Project a large international and inter-confessional Consultative Conference was convened in Warsaw in June 1998 and a further Consultative Conference is to be held in Kiev in the summer of this year 2000.

The Apartheid Regime in South Africa

THE struggle against apartheid in South Africa can be regarded as an ethnic-religious conflict. The ethnic dimension of the conflict is obvious since both British and Boer were differentiated from the indigenous black population not only by skin colour but also by far greater military and economic power and a very different cultural background. The religious dimension arises from the theological underpinning of apartheid by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) which claimed biblical authority for "separate development". The Afrikaner leaders all belonged to the DRC and many had also been members of the secret society "The Broederbond". They were steeped in Calvinist Old Testament theology. In their

racist policies the DRC gave them theological support for many years. However, when all the principal churches in South Africa, including the DRC, finally met in the Rustenberg Conference in November 1990 and issued a statement condemning the system of apartheid this was a fatal blow to the theological arguments that had until then bolstered support for “separate development”.

The non-white population of the Union of South Africa, numbering some four fifths of the total population, had been deprived of political rights and subjected to humiliating measures of control even before the formation of the Union in 1910. Their situation took a serious turn for the worse, however, when the Afrikaner Nationalist Party came to power in 1948 and began to implement its crudely racist policies. Under the Population Registration Act of 1950 the entire population of South Africa was classified by race and subgroup, and the position of an individual in this classification determined where he or she could live, whom they could marry, how they were educated, their standard of living, their right to travel or to engage in sport. Those in the lower categories were simply deprived of all their human rights. Breaches of these racist laws were brutally suppressed by the police and the army. Despite all this and despite the condemnation of apartheid by the World Council of Churches, the DRC continued to underpin “separate development”. Even the African National Congress (ANC), formed in 1912 to support the non-white population, which had long maintained a policy of non-violence, was ultimately driven underground. The ANC then formed a military wing “Umkhonto we Sizwe” or “MK” (The Spear of the Nation) which planned and undertook acts of sabotage. In 1961 it had set up secret headquarters at Lilliesleaf farm in Rivonia, a semi-rural suburb outside the municipal limits of Johannesburg. On the 11 July, 1963, the police, acting on a tip-off, raided the farm and captured not only several of the leaders of MK but also numerous documents describing future plans for sabotage, many in Nelson Mandela’s handwriting. Mandela himself, at the time, was in prison, having been arrested in August 1962 and sentenced to five years in jail for having gone abroad without a passport.

The Rivonia Trial was a crucial event in the struggle against apartheid for several reasons. The proceedings in court established Mandela’s position as the most outstanding personality among the group of highly intelligent and dedicated defendants. The trial focussed the attention of the world’s media on the courtroom in Johannesburg and enabled the defendants to make their case not just to the court but to the world. By choosing to make his final speech from the dock Mandela was able to speak without cross-examination or interruption and so to give a comprehensive account of the effects of apartheid and of the development of his political thinking. He spoke for four hours, concluding with the words: “I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die”. Death sentences were, in fact, widely expected for at least some of the accused. Had death sentences been awarded and carried out it is almost certain that this would

have triggered a bloody revolution in South Africa and other states in Africa might have become involved. So the life sentences pronounced on eight of the accused were also a crucial decision and were received almost with relief. They preserved the possibility of the eventual peaceful resolution of the conflict that was in the end achieved.

The principal architect of the transition to democratic rule was Nelson Mandela who, even from prison, was able to advise and influence the ANC but his initiatives to the government were all rebuffed until F.W. de Clerk became President and had the courage to release him. In his 27 years imprisonment Mandela had learned to control the natural reaction of anger against his gaolers and to reach a vision of a free South Africa offering equal opportunities to all its citizens of whatever race or colour. After his release he said: "I knew that people expected me to harbour anger against whites, but I had none. In prison my anger against whites decreased but my hatred for the system grew".

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

IN 1994 the result of the first genuinely democratic elections in South Africa gave the new ANC government a convincing mandate for radical reform. There remained on both sides of the political spectrum, however, a significant number of dissatisfied extremists, including many in both black and white communities who had committed serious crimes of violence in the course of the civil war. To bring individual prosecutions in the criminal courts against the perpetrators would have taken many years and for lack of witnesses many charges would have had to be dropped. To take no action would have been entirely unsatisfactory. The decision to set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) with Archbishop Desmond Tutu as chairman and with power to grant amnesty to all those who came forward voluntarily and confessed to their part in crimes, had the merit that such crimes were thus documented and could no longer be denied. It also offered the amnestied citizens the chance to put their past behind them and take part in the democratic development of the country. This was not the first time that a 'Truth Commission' had been set up at the end of a civil war. In Argentina (1984), Chile (1991), El Salvador (1993) and in a few other cases similar methods had been tried. The scheme adopted in South Africa had to take into account the particular history and conditions of apartheid. Urging it on both sides in October, 1977, Tutu had said: "Please take this, the most generous offer of healing with the past. Grab it, because once it is past it will not return". Some prominent political leaders who were deeply involved in the apartheid regime refused to attend the TRC and so have neither been amnestied nor have they been prosecuted. To have insisted on prosecuting them was judged to make wider reconciliation less likely and thus inhibit co-operation in the task of reconstruction. But they have not been amnestied and the charges against them remain on the record.

The Challenge of Fundamentalism

IN all the world religions there are groups of believers whose fervid identification with their own religion is expressed most strongly as condemnation of all other faiths. We call them ‘fundamentalists’ despite the fact that they tend to neglect the *fundamental* spiritual and moral bases of their own faith, substituting for its moral teaching a rigid observance of its outward symbols and credulous acceptance of its myths. Fundamentalism has been the source of most of the intractable religious quarrels that have led to, or sustained, wars – Catholic vs Protestant, Christianity vs Islam, Hindu vs Muslim, etc. Fundamentalism in religion has its counterpart in secular politics as extremism, whether of the left or of the right. Today, both attitudes consist in an unwillingness to acknowledge any need for change in the tenets of the faith or of the political system espoused, despite the enormous changes that have taken place in the past few decades, let alone centuries, in our knowledge of the physical world and of human relationships.

Fundamentalism usually draws its emotional appeal from struggles long past and the myths that have gathered around them. Serb nationalists still seek revenge for the defeat of the Serbian army by Muslim invaders at the battle of Kosovo in 1389 that led to several centuries of Ottoman rule and this attitude exacerbates their relations with their Muslim neighbours to this day. The antagonism between North and South in Ireland, while it has economic as well as ethnic and religious causes, draws much emotional appeal from events that took place three centuries ago and the myths and songs that describe them.

The commitment of the energy and idealism of young men and young women today to such fundamentalist causes is the saddest and most intractable aspect of the problem. Many are willing to die (as well as to kill) for the cause they espouse, sometimes encouraged by their religious belief that voluntary martyrdom will ensure certain and immediate entry into heaven. A religion that encourages or simply fails to disavow such archaic beliefs must be held responsible for the hostilities they provoke and the lives thus lost. Though less aggressive in form, the fundamentalist belief in Orthodox Judaism that the Jews have been chosen by the Deity to enjoy special privileges may prevent them from achieving harmonious relations with other racial groups within their own or neighbouring countries as belief in this special relationship is likely to preclude the compromises that are always required to resolve disputes over land or other natural resources such as water or oil. Even a small minority of fundamentalists using violent methods can destroy peace and tranquillity within a country or between neighbouring states.

The Parliament of the World Religions

DURING the second half of the 20th century the various denominations of the Christian Church throughout the world began to talk to one another in more friendly tones – ecumenism became the name of the game even although existing doctrinal differences remained. If a similar spirit of tolerance could be promoted between the different world religions this would surely lead to the elimination of wars of religion. Recognising that religion had been a potent cause of war in the past and that religious differences were still able to inject passion into conflicts arising from other primary causes, Professor Hans Küng became convinced that “there will be no peace in the world until there is peace between the religions”.

He decided therefore to revive the idea of a Parliament of the World Religions. An assembly with this title had met in Chicago in the autumn of 1893 under the auspices of the Columbian World Exposition celebrating the arrival of Columbus in America 400 years earlier. The Second Parliament was convened, also in Chicago, on the 100th anniversary of the first and it brought together some 6500 representatives of the world’s principal religions, who came not as delegates appointed by religious hierarchies but as individual representatives of their religion. The assembly, therefore, was not set up as a new institution but rather as a ‘movement’ of people of many different religions who recognised the importance of religious faith in human affairs and who were willing to meet and confer on this matter with adherents of faiths other than their own.

The Parliament met for the week 28 August to 4 September 1993 and, after much discussion, adopted the text of a Declaration of Principles of a Global Ethic (see [Appendix B](#)). Support for this Global Ethic has come from many distinguished men and women belonging to various countries and faiths and in different walks of life; religious leaders, statesmen, artists, physicians, Nobel Peace Laureates and men and women of goodwill everywhere. Progress towards the goal of a Global Ethic has been provided for by setting up an Interaction Council consisting of the former Heads of State or of Government of 20 countries. Recognising that in recent decades human rights have been much discussed without similar attention being paid to human responsibilities, the Interaction Council has now published (1998) a draft for a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities (see [Appendix B](#)) to be read in parallel with the Declaration of Principles of a Global Ethic.

Clearly, these two declarations will only become generally effective if adopted by the leaders and councils of the various world religions and incorporated into their religious teachings. Most world religions already have basic moral principles (e.g. thou shalt not kill) explicitly stated in their scriptures but have often been willing to waive these principles when attacked by, or attacking, a different religious group. The two declarations appear to be sufficiently specific to prevent such waiver but only time will tell. The exercise of drawing them up and seeking to have them widely approved is in itself a very positive step.

Some Conclusions

- a. After even the most bitter conflicts, reconciliation is not impossible but it will take a long time -- more than 50 years in the case of the European conflicts examined.
- b. The process can be initiated by an individual whose sincerity is recognised by both sides. (e.g. Iwand, Niemöller, Mandela, John Hume)
- c. Agreement on the historical facts, as perceived by both sides, is a first requirement, then acceptance of responsibility for past actions. Only then can forgiveness be given and received and reconciliation achieved.
- d. Religious leaders should be proactive in seeking ways to understand one another and to unite on an ethical value system appropriate to the Global Village we now inhabit.

APPENDIX A: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CZECHS AND GERMANS

The Historical Setting

THE most recent manifestation of this conflict began when the Nazi party came to power in Germany in 1933 and began to stir up trouble among the ethnic German population settled in Czechoslovakia along the border with Germany and Austria. The origins of the conflict, however, go back at least as far as the Thirty Years War. Until the 13th century the German-speaking peoples along the Bohemian border were merely powerful neighbours with whom the Czechs in Bohemia and Moravia had to find a *modus vivendi*. In that century the King of Bohemia invited German-language colonists into his country. They settled mainly in the relatively uninhabited and forested area along the frontier, developed crafts and trade and built towns. The fact that the colonists brought with them more highly developed skills and cultural resources than the indigenous population and spoke a quite different language prevented the two groups merging. Even when many Germans and Czechs became bilingual the two language groups remained separate but the official language of Bohemia and Moravia, after the decline of Latin, was Czech.

The German settlers, as subjects of the Bohemian King, enjoyed the same rights as the Czechs but they remained a minority group, albeit an important one, an island of German culture within the Bohemian state. Together Czechs and Germans took part in the Reformation and the Hussite wars and gradually achieved within their country a degree of tolerance and of freedom of conscience remarkable for that era. The political atmosphere changed after the Bohemian crown passed to the Hapsburgs, and the Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648) and the spread of the counter reformation led to a fundamental change. In the Battle of the White Mountain

(1620) the Bohemian aristocracy were defeated by the Hapsburgs and most were driven out of the country. By the end of the 18th century the Bohemian state had lost its identity, at first in practice and later in law.

Czech demands for independence surfaced again during the revolutionary year 1848 and were given new impetus by the emergence of Hungary as an independent state (1867). The Czech demands failed largely because of opposition from the German minority in Bohemia. On the other hand, the Czechs prevented their German compatriots from joining with other German states in 1871 to form a united Germany. These events drove the two cultural groups further apart into separate defensive positions.

In 1890 plans to divide Bohemia along the border separating the two population groups found support even among a section of the Czech representatives but nothing came of these talks. The idea was even mooted of evicting one of the groups from culturally mixed regions and it was the Czechs who were to be driven out. This proposal went no further than words but it aggravated the estrangement between the two communities.

During the first world war some Czechoslovak units were formed which fought on the Allied side on various war fronts. The creation of the Republic of Czechoslovakia as part of the peace settlement, with Thomas Masaryk (1850-1937) as President, was welcomed by Czechs and Slovaks but the Bohemian Germans were shocked to find themselves a minority in a Slav state. On 4 March 1919 protest demonstrations took place in various parts of the country in some of which public buildings were attacked. When Czech troops used force to quell these protests there were 53 deaths, of which 51 were Germans.

In the new Republic the German minority enjoyed the same civil rights as the Czech and Slovak majority and had their own schools, including the German University in Prague. However, despite some warning voices, most Czechs saw no urgent need to win over the German minority to active support of the Czechoslovak model of democracy. In fact, the new Czechoslovak state, despite any shortcomings, gave its citizens belonging to minority groups greater democratic freedom and civil rights than any of the other new states carved out of the former Hapsburg Empire. As time went by the relationships between the different ethnic groups grew calmer. However, the world depression of 1929 hit German light industry in the border regions harder than Czech heavy industry in the interior, causing higher unemployment and real poverty among the German population, which the Czech coalition government failed to deal with adequately. This failure on the economic front was one reason why Hitler's propaganda in the 1930's made so much headway among the Sudeten Germans and it represents also the principal charge that can be made against the Czechoslovak government for its part in the collapse of the First Republic.

The Munich Agreement of 1938

In Czechoslovakia this “agreement” was, and is, called the Munich Dictate for no representatives of the Czechoslovak Government were admitted to the talks that settled their fate. By its terms the Czechoslovak army withdrew from the strongly fortified border regions without firing a shot. Tens of thousands of refugees fled into the interior of the state which continued to give asylum to anti-Nazi refugees from other regions until six months later, on 15 March 1939, the German army occupied the whole of the country and the Czech region became the “Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia”, while Slovakia was designated a “free” republic although actually totally dominated by Germany.

Immediately after the occupation Jews were arrested as were also democratic leaders and representatives of the intelligentsia. They were either killed or sent to concentration camps. In the autumn of 1939 all Czech Institutes of higher education were closed, students’ representatives were executed and the whole annual intake of students was enlisted for slave labour in Germany. The principal victims of the German occupation were the Jews but also the intellectual elite, university professors, teachers, writers, youth leaders. The aim, which was fully revealed in documents discovered after the end of the war, was to liquidate “unreliable” elements in society, e.g. the intelligentsia, to “Germanise” the racially acceptable fraction and to drive the remainder into regions of little interest to Germany such as the Crimea.

The loss of life in the whole of Czechoslovakia due to the Nazi terror has been estimated at 340,000 to 360,000 persons and this terror lasted until the very end of the war. In Prague an uprising that occurred only three days before the German capitulation was put down with all the customary brutality.

Lidice

One atrocity that illustrates the horror of the German occupation is the total destruction, by Hitler’s personal orders, of the villages of Lidice and Ležáky as a reprisal for the attack on Heydrich, the Deputy Governor of the “Protectorate”. Lidice, a small Bohemian village 22 km from Prague, has become for Czechs a symbol of all the crimes committed in Bohemia and Moravia during the German occupation. On the 4th June 1942 Gestapo forces surrounded the village and searched unsuccessfully for two parachutists suspected of having organised the attack on Heydrich. Twenty six villagers, including seven women, were immediately seized and executed. A few days later the Gestapo again surrounded the village, this time supported by the army, and all the women, numbering 216, were taken away and 213 were sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. The 172 men above the age of 14, after recording their name, age, address and trade were placed in groups of ten facing a wall and shot. 101 younger children taken from their mothers were sent away for “appropriate education”. However, 82 of them

were killed by gas in the camp at Chelm in Poland. The contents of the houses were burnt and fifteen army tanks razed to the ground their walls, leaving a large flat plain where the village had stood.

Theresienstadt (Terezin) Concentration Camp

Theresienstadt is a sad place consisting almost entirely of barracks. The town, called the Great Fortress, was built by Kaiser Josef II in 1780 to 1790 as a defence against Prussia. It was never required to fulfil this duty but remained a garrison town with thick walls and deep ditches and so was well suited to the Nazis' purposes. The small fort at the edge of the town served as police and military prison. During the occupation 33,430 persons were murdered or died from starvation, illness or infectious disease in the camp, almost a quarter of the 139,654 prisoners who passed through its gates, coming principally from Bohemia and Moravia but also from other European countries. Theresienstadt was for many a threshold to Auschwitz or other extermination camp.

The End of the Second World War

The events that had occurred during and after W.W.II were so horrific that it could well be doubted whether Czechs and Germans could ever again live peaceably in the same country. Following the capitulation of the German army in the spring of 1945 a wave of pent-up hatred swept over Germans wherever they were found, in accordance with the principle of "collective guilt". The ensuing collective punishment was supported by some leading Czechs. In many places Czech mobs practised lynch justice and carried out mass executions. German property was seized and the owners driven over the frontier or packed into concentration camps. Not a few of these camps acquired an evil reputation for the brutality of the guards. Some compromise plans were at first proposed by President Benes which did not involve the wholesale deportation of the Sudeten Germans but popular pressure from within the country and Stalin's insistence on creating "stability" in post-war Europe made Benes change his mind and envisage a complete eviction of the Sudeten German population, a measure that was approved by the Allied Powers in Conference at Potsdam.

These controlled evictions took place mainly in 1946. In the spring of 1947 they were stopped by the resistance of the Western Powers. In all, about 3 million Germans had been driven out and 300,000 remained in the CSSR, some of them unwillingly. The number of deaths that occurred during the evictions was estimated by a joint German-Czech Commission of Historians to be, as a maximum, 30,000.

Comments by an anonymous Czech speaker

After the war the German people learned of the crimes committed in their name by German hands. They could not close their eyes to the truth and had to come to terms with it. One result has been that the sites associated with particularly horrible Nazi crimes have become places of pilgrimage, for meditation and repentance, visited by large numbers of Germans every year.

Nothing of a similar kind has yet happened on the Czech side. The eviction of Germans in 1946 was considered by most Czechs to be a just punishment and Czech responsibility for the abuses that occurred was absolved by reference to the agreement of the Allied Powers at the Potsdam Conference. Crimes committed by Czechs during the evictions were not mentioned. Some discussion of the evictions began at the time of Charter 77 but only after 1989 was it possible to give the events their proper name. Many Czechs therefore found out only recently what had happened in their own country after the war ended. They were shocked by the facts and tried to deny them. Indeed, they found themselves in the same position as many Germans did at the end of the war. Czechs, too, must learn to acknowledge that crimes did occur and to reflect on them. So far only a few solitary voices and small groups have been able to express remorse. To reach wider circles will take time and we Czechs ask the German people to grant us this time, for it is needed in order to conduct an internal Czech discussion of the facts.

It is not only the forced march of the Germans from Brno to Austria that bears comparison with the Nazi “death marches”. Similar marches that caused hundreds of deaths must enter the Czech consciousness e.g. the march to Iglau or that from Píbram to Prague in which some 300 out of a total of 1300 Germans died. The Czech people must become aware that conditions in Czech internment camps for Germans, often the same camps used by the Nazis, e.g. Theresienstadt, were in many cases characterised by deliberate brutality. Czechs must repent not only for the massacre of Germans that occurred in Ústí nad Labem/Aussig but also for similar massacres in other places, many at least as bad as the events in Ústí/Aussig.

Relations between the Churches

During the first world war a Church Court in Vienna decreed that the evangelical churches in Bohemia and Moravia be formally united. However, within this union the German speaking and Czech speaking members formed separate congregations and so distanced themselves from one another. In 1918, after the formation of Czechoslovakia, the Czech language group formed the Evangelical Church of the Bohemian Brethren and in 1919 the German language group became the independent German Evangelical Church in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia (DEK). The attitudes of these churches to the State differed. The Bohemian Brethren expressed primary loyalty to Christian teaching and only pragmatic loyalty to the state as did the Confessional Church in Germany, while the DEK regarded the State as an institution established by divine authority, demanding loyalty to all its laws.

First Attempts at Reconciliation by the Churches

The “iron curtain” of silence that separated Germany and Czechoslovakia after the end of W.W. II was first broken by the visit of Martin Niemöller to Prague in 1954. His leading role in the Confessional Church in Germany, his long imprisonment in concentration camp and his opposition to German rearmament were well known to the Evangelical Church of the Bohemian Brothers and these facts made him an acceptable emissary. His sermon in Prague’s Martinikirche on John 19, 5 : “Behold the Man” left a deep impression. In conversations with the students of the theological faculty he warned against mutual demonisation of the communist East and the capitalist West.

The first official visit of a delegation from the Evangelical Church in Germany took place in March, 1955. Prominent among the delegates were Otto Dibelius and Gustav Heinemann (later President of the German Federal Republic). At the end of September, 1955, a high level delegation, which included Professor Josef L. Hromádka and Victor Hajek from the Czechoslovak churches made a reciprocal visit to church leaders and congregations in East and West Germany. These visits prepared the way for the political treaty signed nearly twenty years later (December 1973) between Gustav Husak, Communist Party Chief in the CSSR, and Willy Brandt, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) which established mutual recognition and permission for cross-border visits but one could not at that time talk of real reconciliation.

Next Steps in Reconciliation

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 a series of meetings between leaders of the Evangelical Church in Germany and of the Church of the Czech Brethren began. At the first meeting it was agreed that the two delegations would each prepare a factual statement of the historical record of Czech-German relations as experienced and believed by their community and present these statements to the next meeting. The two “factual” statements were so widely different that it was only after several years and repeated meetings that a joint statement could be agreed which incorporated the perceptions and grievances of both groups. Once this stage had been reached other matters rapidly fell into place. The agreed statement was then published in November 1996 as a bilingual booklet entitled "Reconciliation between Czechs and Germans" with Czech and German paragraphs on facing pages. In 1998 a larger book entitled "The Fence Dividing Us is Broken Down" giving a wider historical survey and much information designed to promote friendship between their two communities was published in parallel Czech and German editions.

[Much of the information in this paper is abbreviated from the German edition of the latter book]

Restitution or Reparations

Peace settlements have often been bedevilled by the question of reparations either in money or in land or services e.g. the Versailles Treaty. In the Czech-German conflict between 1938 and 1946 eviction had taken place in both directions and any attempt to restore the status quo ante would raise the question ante what? The grandchildren of the evicted Sudeten Germans had by now found their place in the Federal Republic of Germany and few, if any, would wish to be uprooted in order to reclaim a farm or house vacated by their grandparents nearly fifty years earlier, though they might well be interested to visit the spot where their forbears had lived. The decision was taken to make no reparations but to encourage wherever possible friendly links between present owners and past owners or their descendants as an additional process of reconciliation. Many visits across the border have since taken place and the friendships formed are consolidating the peace process.

Joint Declaration by the Czech and German Governments

On 21 January 1997 the Heads of Government of the Czech republic and of the Federal Republic of Germany met in Prague and signed a formal Declaration governing their mutual relationship and its future development. This document had been drawn up during intensive negotiations during the previous two years and it addressed the many disputed questions that had prevented reconciliation until then. The question of claims for reparations put forward by individuals or organisations from either side was dealt with by the clause: "Each side respects the fact that the other side has a different interpretation of the legal position. They both declare, therefore, that they will not allow their relationship to be burdened with political and legal questions arising from the past." Instead, they agreed to set up a joint "Fund for the Future" to support joint projects and to fund new institutions designed to further "a fruitful partnership between Czechs and Germans". In line with such undertakings for the future, Germany has supported the application of the Czech Republic to join the European Union.

In a final clause in the agreement the two governments agreed that the historical development of the relationship between Germans and Czechs, especially in the first half of the 20th century requires further collaborative research and are therefore in favour of continuing the successful work already done by the German-Czech Commission of Historians. They also believe that the maintenance and care of the cultural heritage that Czechs and Germans have in common can make an important contribution to building bridges into the future. Both parties also agree to set up a Forum for the discussion of Czech-German questions with support from the Fund for the Future.

APPENDIX B: THE PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

RECOGNISING that religion had been a potent cause of war in the past and that religious differences were still able to inject passion into conflicts arising from other primary causes, Professor Hans Küng became convinced that “there will be no peace in the world until there is peace between the religions.” He decided, therefore, to revive the idea of a Parliament of the World Religions. An assembly with this title had met in Chicago in the autumn of 1893 under the auspices of the Columbian World Exposition celebrating the arrival of Columbus in America 400 years earlier. The Second Parliament was convened, also in Chicago, on the 100th anniversary of the first and it brought together some 6500 representatives of the world’s principal religions, who came not as delegates appointed by religious hierarchies but as individual members of their faith community. The assembly, therefore, was not set up as a new institution but rather as a ‘movement’ among people of many different religions who recognised the relevance of religious faith to human affairs and who were willing to meet and confer on this matter with adherents of faiths other than their own.

The main aim of the Parliament was to discuss and if possible agree upon a system of ethical principles acceptable to all the faiths represented which could serve as the model for a Global Ethic. A document containing a draft of such a declaration had been prepared by Hans Küng and modified to take account of consultations with numerous religious leaders throughout the world. This draft was further discussed and modified in Chicago by the Council of the Parliament and was available for signature by the delegates at the end of the meeting. Members of the following religions signed the document: (figures in brackets indicate the number of signatures in each category)

Bahai (6), Brahma Kumaris (2), Buddhism (16), Christianity (45), Native Religions (7), Hinduism (17), Jainism (7), Judaism (9), Islam (18), Neo-pagans (3), Sikhs (7), Taoists (1), Theosophists (1), Zoroastrians (8).

The Declaration of the Principles of a Global Ethic

We declare:

- We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil.
- We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences.
- We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and

acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of world community, practising a culture of solidarity and relatedness.

- We consider humankind our family. We must try to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.
- We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture, or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.
- We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world. Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking. Without risk and a readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially-beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life.
- We invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same.

Signatories were, of course, well aware that signing this declaration was merely a first step, but a significant one, in the process of finding common ground among the world religions and eradicating long-standing hostilities. The various religions were represented not by their hierarchies but by some 6500 members, lay men and women and others engaged full time in religious offices, who had come together in response to the general invitation and who had, therefore, the purpose of the meeting at heart.

Support for this Global Ethic has come from many distinguished men and women belonging to various countries and faiths and in different walks of life; religious leaders, statesmen, artists, physicians, Nobel Peace Laureates and men and women of goodwill everywhere.

Future action to further the acceptance of a Global Ethic has been provided for by establishing an Interaction Council consisting of the former Heads of State or of Government of 20 countries. Recognising that in recent decades human rights have

been much discussed without similar attention being paid to human responsibilities, the Interaction Council has now published (1998) a draft for a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, to be read in parallel with the Declaration of the Principles of a Global Ethic.

A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities

Article 1. Every person, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, social status, political opinion, language, age, nationality, or religion, has a responsibility to treat all people in a humane way.

Article 2. No person should lend support to any form of inhumane behaviour, but all people have a responsibility to strive for the dignity and self-esteem of all others.

Article 3. No person, no group or organisation, no state, no army or police stands above good and evil; all are subject to ethical standards. Everyone has a responsibility to promote good and to avoid evil in all things.

Article 4. All people, endowed with reason and conscience, must accept a responsibility to each and all, to families and communities, to races, nations, and religions in a spirit of solidarity: What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not do to others.

Article 5. Every person has a responsibility to respect life. No one has the right to injure, to torture or to kill another human person. This does not exclude the right of justified self-defence of individuals or of communities.

Article 6. Disputes between states, groups or individuals should be resolved without violence. No government should tolerate or participate in acts of genocide or terrorism, nor should it abuse women, children or any other civilians as instruments of war. Every citizen and public official has a responsibility to act in a peaceful, non-violent way.

Article 7. Every person is infinitely precious and must be protected unconditionally. The animals and the natural environment also demand protection. All people have a responsibility to protect the air, water and soil of the earth for the sake of present inhabitants and future generations.

Article 8. Every person has a responsibility to behave with integrity, honesty and fairness. No person or group should rob or arbitrarily deprive any other person or group of their property.

Article 9. All people, given the necessary tools, have a responsibility to make serious efforts to overcome poverty, malnutrition, ignorance and inequality. They

should promote sustainable development all over the world in order to assure dignity, freedom, security and justice to all people.

Article 10. All people have a responsibility to develop their talents through diligent endeavour; they should have equal access to education and to meaningful work. Everyone should lend support to the needy, the disadvantaged, the disabled and to the victims of discrimination.

Article 11. All property and wealth must be used responsibly in accordance with justice and for the advancement of the human race. Economic and political power must not be handled as an instrument of domination, but in the service of economic justice and of the social order.

Article 12. Every person has a responsibility to speak and act truthfully. No one, however high or mighty, should speak lies. The right to privacy and to personal and professional confidentiality is to be respected. No one is obliged to tell all the truth to everyone all the time.

Article 13. No politicians, public servants, business leaders, scientists, writers or artists are exempt from general ethical standards, nor are physicians, lawyers and other professionals who have special duties to clients. Professional and other codes of ethics should reflect the priority of general standards such as those of truthfulness and fairness.

Article 14. The freedom of the media to inform the public and to criticise institutions of society and governmental actions, which is essential for a just society, must be used with responsibility and discretion. Freedom of the media carries a special responsibility for accurate and truthful reporting. Sensational reporting that degrades the human person or dignity must at all times be avoided.

Article 15. While religious freedom must be guaranteed, the representatives of religions have a special responsibility to avoid expressions of prejudice and acts of discrimination towards those of different beliefs. They should not incite or legitimise hatred, fanaticism and religious wars but should foster tolerance and mutual respect between all people.

Article 16. All men and all women have a responsibility to show respect to one another and understanding in their partnership. No one should subject another person to sexual exploitation or dependence. Rather, sexual partners should accept the responsibility of caring for each other's well-being.

Article 17. In all its cultural and religious varieties, marriage requires love, loyalty and forgiveness and should aim at guaranteeing security and mutual support.

Article 18. Sensible family planning is the responsibility of every couple. The relationship between parents and children should reflect mutual love, respect, appreciation and concern. No parents or other adults should exploit, abuse or maltreat children.

Article 19. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any state, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the responsibilities, rights and freedom set forth in this Declaration and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

NOTES:

1. John Avery's paper.