

1916, A Hundred Years On...



A SHORT GUIDE TO EVENTS IN IRELAND AROUND 1916
to inform and enable discussion on the significant historical
events and on the two Plays written by Philip Orr.

1916, A HUNDRED YEARS ON

This is a project for 2016, undertaken by Contemporary Christianity, with resources including two short dramas by Philip Orr which provides scope for wide-ranging discussions.

*'What keeps hearts from falseness...
is that there is nowhere to hide and plenty of room for vision...'*

JOSEPH BRODSKY

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***"Hope is a central Christian principle - hopefully we can learn lessons
from the past as we struggle to work for a better future"***
NOEL McCUNE
(Chairman Contemporary Christianity, January 2012)

Community Relations Council



This project has received support from the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council which aims to promote a pluralist society characterised by equity, respect for diversity, and recognition of interdependence.

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A note about the publisher

Contemporary Christianity is the successor to Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI, 1988 – 2005) and the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland (2005-2010). ECONI emerged against the background of our community division and political violence in Northern Ireland, when a group of evangelical Christians argued for a new response. Their conviction was that faithful witness must take seriously the biblical command to make peace and do justice.

Contemporary Christianity exists to help Christians and churches in Northern Ireland effectively serve Christ in our changing world. Profound changes in culture have swept through Europe in recent years. In Northern Ireland we have particular issues to address and contributing to the Decade of Centenaries is one of our key themes.

REBELLION DYING OUT.

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER IN DUBLIN

After a Week of Anarchy.

SCENES OF BLOODSHED & LOOTING.

Sackville Street in Ruins.

THE POST OFFICE DESTROYED.

Despatches from Field-Marshal French.

SITUATION IN SOUTH AND WEST

Belfast News Letter headlines, 1st May 1916

THE DUBLIN REBELLION

Movement Spreading.

PREMIER'S STATEMENT IN PARLIAMENT.

Mr. Birrell Criticised.

COMMUNICATION WITH ENGLAND RESTORED

The Censorship of News.

Belfast News Letter headlines, 29th April 1916

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDERS: OFFICIAL

BACK OF THE REBELLION BROKEN."

DUBIOUS INSURGENT LEADERS IN PROVINCIAL
NEGOTIATING UNDER FLAG OF TRUCE.

TERRIBLE DESTRUCTION IN THE METROPOLIS.

CONNELL STREET PARTLY BURNED: POST OFFICE
DESTROYED: BIG FIRES RAGING.

SH LEADER'S MESSAGE TO PEOPLE: MESSAGES FROM PEOPLE TO LEADERS

and Wicked Movement Directed Against the National Cause: Home Rule
Indestructible, Declares Redmond.

OVER SEVEN HUNDRED CAPTURES: FATE OF CONNOLLY: PEARSE'S POSITION.

Denying Stories of Incidents in Ireland's Latest Tragic Story: Terrible Episodes of
the Final Scenes in the Streets.

Irish News headlines, 1st May 1916

WAKE OF A HOPELESS REBELLION.

HEARTRENDING STORIES AND SCENES OF DESTRUCTION.

£2,000,000 DUBLIN FIRES.

DREADFUL STORY OF LOSS OF LIFE
AND PROPERTY.

DEAD IN HOSPITALS ALONE, 188.

SOME OF THE HARROWING DETAILS OF A PROFOUND TRAGEDY.

FAMOUS BUILDINGS DESTROYED BY SHELL FIRE AND INCENDIARISM.

"Freeman's Journal" Offices Amongst the List of Premises Wiped Out in the Inferno: Thrilling
Battle Stories: Future of the Four Courts and Post Office.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. JOHN DILLON, M.P.

Irish News headlines, 3rd May 1916

DUBLIN EXECUTIONS.

FOUR MORE REBEL LEADERS SHOT UNDER
MARTIAL LAW.

EIGHTEEN GET TERMS OF PENAL SERVITUDE.

House-to-House Searches for Arms and Fugitives Begun: Nearly Normal
Conditions of City Resumed.

THE GENERAL OFFICIAL INQUIRY.

INTERESTING STATEMENTS IN HOUSE OF COMMONS.

FURTHER SNIPING: PROVINCIAL QUIET.

Irish News Headlines, 5th May 1916

1916, A HUNDRED YEARS ON...

This project is another creative response to the current decade of political centenaries. These anniversaries mark the important developments that shaped our country a century ago, for better or worse.

Contemporary Christianity has already launched a number of initiatives, designed to encourage learning and discussion. Christian churches and individual Christians played an often adversarial role in the events of a hundred years ago - it is surely the responsibility of present-day Christians and non-Christians alike to reflect on this troubled and important period of history.

After all, two significant political documents of this period, the Covenant of 1912 and the Proclamation of 1916, invoked the blessing of the Christian God. The Easter Rising infuriated Protestant clergy in Ireland whereas attitudes amongst most of the leaders of Irish Catholicism changed from hostility to sympathy.

It is also vital to recognise that throughout the Great War from 1914 to 1918, most clergy in Germany and Britain were equally convinced that God was on their side and that the soldiers at the front were doing His will.

To stimulate discussion around 1916, we have created two dramatic scripts which are suitable for performance. "HALFWAY HOUSE" is being offered as live show in different venues in January 2016. "STORMONT HOUSE RULES!" will be available as a script. Both scripts can be ordered or downloaded from our website for a small payment. By making both scripts available we are encouraging them to be performed by interested parties. A filmed recording of "HALFWAY HOUSE" will also be available to purchase by the end of January 2016. Details on www.contemporarychristianity.net

Neither play is set in 1916. "HALFWAY HOUSE" is set in 1966, the 50th anniversary year of the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme. It's early in the year 1966 and two women meet by chance in a snow bound pub in the Sperrin Mountains. They discover that each has a personal connection to the wartime events of fifty years ago in Ireland and abroad. But what is that connection?

"STORMONT HOUSE RULES!" is set in the present day and features an explosive debate between two rival politicians on the subject of the 1916 legacy.

"HALFWAY HOUSE" being set in 1966, halfway between 1916 and 2016 reflects our belief that..... we do not gaze at the past through a window, discerning a clear, unimpeded view of history. Rather, the past is refracted through the lens of subsequent events and coloured by the prism of our fears, sorrows, dreams and hopes.

THE PROCLAMATION

POBLACHT NA hÉIREANN
THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world,

we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades in arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.



The GPO in Dublin - the imposing location for rebel headquarters

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline, and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on behalf of the Provisional Government:

THOMAS J. CLARKE
SEAN Mac DIARMADA THOMAS Mac DONAGH
P. H. PEARSE EAMONN CEANNT
JAMES CONNOLLY JOSEPH PLUNKETT

This famous document was read to the public outside Dublin's General Post Office as a rebellion began on April 24th 1916. It had been composed and printed in secret by senior members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and it would eventually be posted around the city. The major contributor to the text was Patrick Pearse but the document also reflected some of the thought of James Connolly.



The writer, Irish language activist, and rebel leader, Patrick Pearse

In future years the Proclamation would become a revered item for Irish Nationalists and Republicans. It was the foundational document for the Irish Free State which was established in 1922 and for the subsequent Republic of Ireland. In Northern Ireland today, almost all strands of Nationalists and Republicans have great respect for the Proclamation and feel that that its aims and values have not yet been properly fulfilled.

For Unionists and Loyalists, this historic document is looked on with little favour! They assert that the writers had no democratic mandate at the time and they are disturbed by the reference in the text to 'gallant allies' in Europe, who are clearly the Germans - with whom Britain and Ireland were engaged in a deadly war, costing thousands of local lives.

Unionists and Loyalists also dislike the way that the Proclamation seems to claim a God-given right to the loyalties of everyone on the island of Ireland. Given their own political allegiances, it is not surprising that Unionists have always been fearful of this document being used to fuel opposition to the Northern Ireland state.

However, for those who are inspired by the Proclamation, there are many things in its favour, including the deliberate call to both 'Irishmen and Irishwomen', its expression of the desire to cherish 'all the children of the nation equally' and its emphasis on 'civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities...happiness and prosperity.' Many Republicans respect the authors of this document for its emphatic, eloquent wording and its emphasis on a long tradition of struggle against British rule in Ireland. They also note that the Proclamation tries to set clear ethical standards for insurgency in which anyone who engages in cowardice, inhumanity or plunder is unacceptable.

Unionists argue that those standards were not adhered to in 1916 or in more recent conflicts. They believe that Easter 1916 established a cult of blood-sacrifice and violence.

DIFFERING VIEWS ON A LONG AND TROUBLED HISTORY

For some, the history of this island reveals a long story of struggle against illegitimate British ownership. They look back to Elizabeth I's Irish wars and see them as a sustained assault on the language, culture and resources of Gaelic Ireland. Others assert that the Gaelic Ireland which she sought to conquer was itself made up of feuding, rival kingdoms and that sympathy for the Spanish made the island an unwelcome neighbour for Britain in an era of imperial rivalry.

In the eyes of some, the Plantation of Ulster which followed in the early 17th century was a calculating, imperial 'land-grab' that was followed by a century of bloodshed and oppression, epitomised by the ruthless Irish military campaigns of Oliver Cromwell. In the eyes of others, the Plantation brought modernisation and the establishment of the reformed Christian faith in Ireland and simply cannot be equated with ethnic cleansing. They see the victory of William III in Ireland in the last decade of this century as heralding an 18th century era of relative peace and security.



Constance Markievicz, who took part in the rebellion with the Irish Citizens Army

For some people, the 18th century is to be condemned as an era of strict penal laws that subdued all but the privileged Protestant elite. They regard the 1798 rebellion as a blow for freedom in which Presbyterians and Catholics fought for the values of the French and American Revolutions. For other observers, this century is best seen as an age of economic progress, despite considerable poverty, and 1798 is regarded as a terrifying bloodbath, which nonetheless resulted in the end of the corrupt Dublin parliament and the happy outcome of the Act of Union.

For many people, in Ireland and abroad, the Famine which occurred in the mid-19th century is the supreme indictment of British policy in Ireland. They look to the activities of the Land League, Parnell's Irish Parliamentary Party and several low-key episodes of rebellion as proof of a resurgence of Ireland's indefatigable desire for justice and independence. For other observers, the phenomenal growth of Belfast and the development of Unionist confidence are crucial plus-factors and, for them, the strong desire in Ulster for a solid link with Britain is seen as a vital 19th century development.



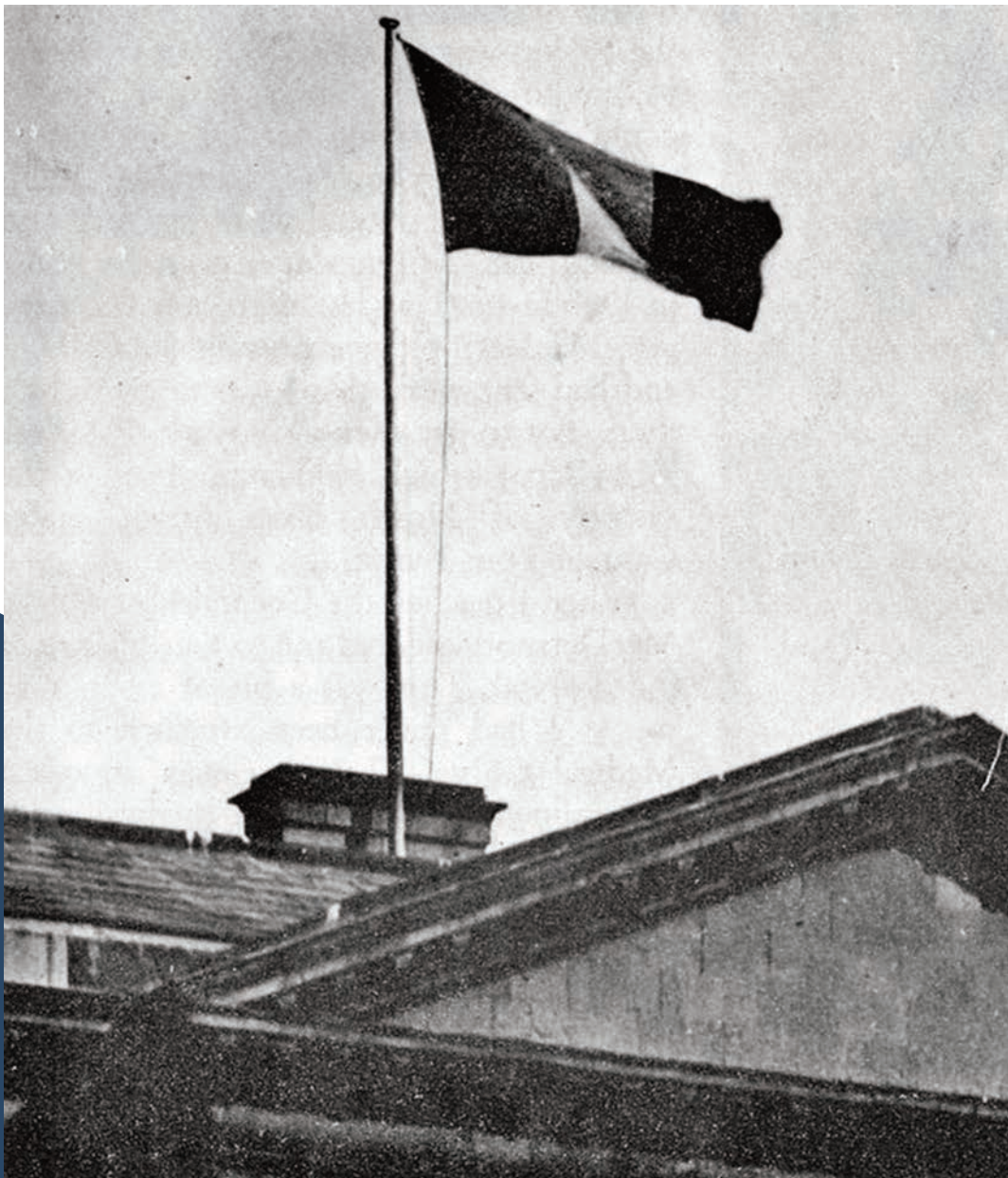
The trade union activist and military commander of the rebellion, James Connolly



Eamon de Valera who went on from taking part in the rebellion to being a future Irish leader



Bulmer Hobson, who had other plans for the rebel strategy in 1916



The Irish Tricolour which was raised over the GPO at the start of Easter week

THE EASTER RISING

Background

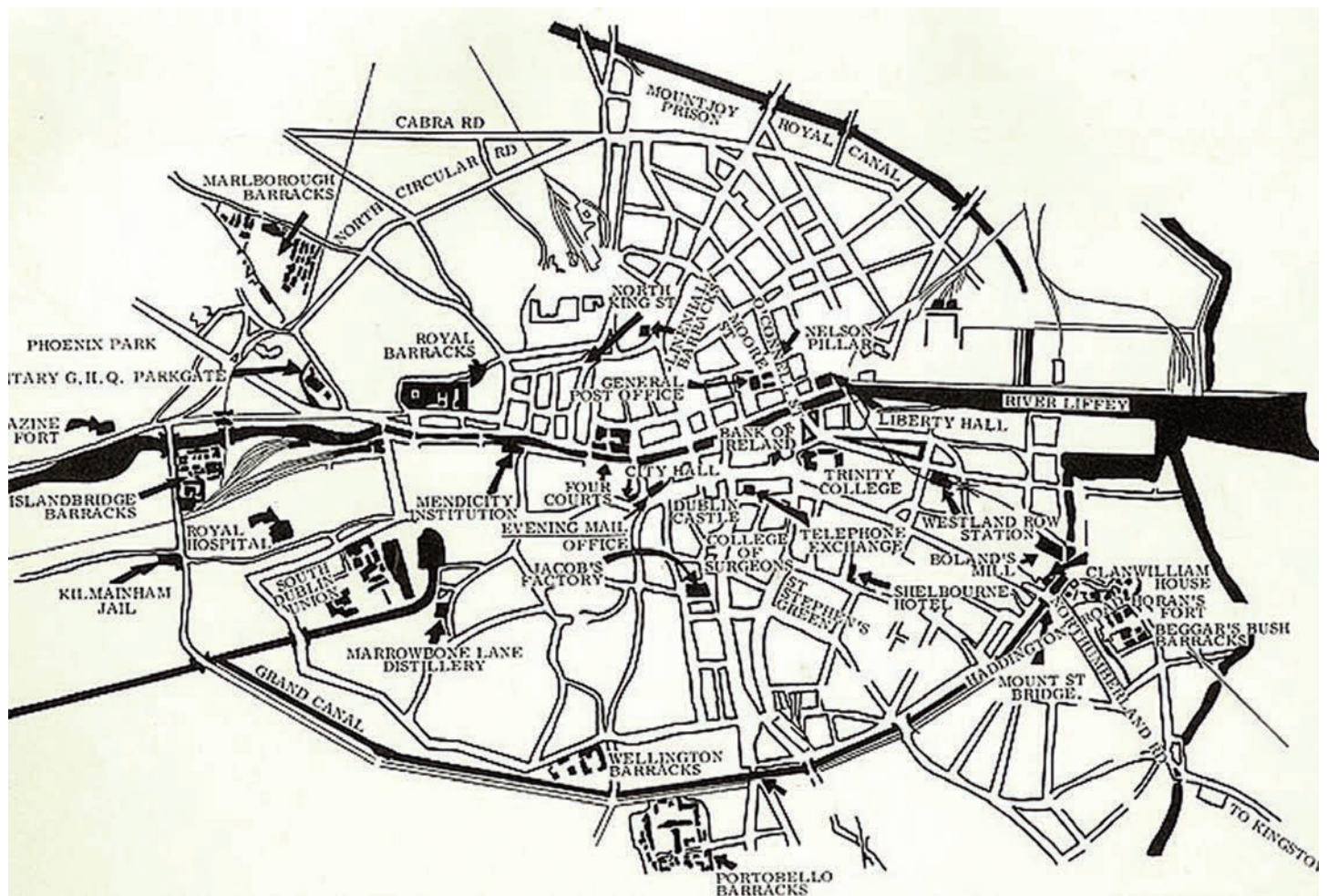
In the early years of the 20th century, the revolutionary body known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood or 'Fenians' existed in the shadows. The dominant Nationalist politician was the MP, John Redmond. In 1910, his party formally aligned itself with the Liberal government in London, enabling that government to pass key reforms in Britain. The reward was the promise of a Home Rule parliament for all of Ireland.

Unionism was deeply opposed to Home Rule, fearing religious, cultural and economic domination. Under the leadership of Sir Edward Carson, a special pledge known as the Ulster Covenant was signed. A militia known as the Ulster Volunteer Force armed itself for the looming conflict. The Irish Republican Brotherhood saw this as an opportunity to promote an organisation which would counter the U.V.F. Thus the Irish Volunteers were formed in the final weeks of 1913 and they too sought to purchase arms.

All this took place against a background of mounting tension, industrial unrest and suffragette militancy in Ireland.



The Starry Plough, flag of the Irish Citizen Army



A number of strategic locations in central Dublin were occupied by the rebels



The Sherwood Foresters, who suffered heavy losses when fighting the rebels



General Maxwell who was in charge of military rule in Ireland in the aftermath of the rebellion

Having won a decisive victory in the first post-war election of 1918, Sinn Féin refused to take its seats at Westminster and created its own parliament in Dublin. A guerrilla campaign by the Irish Volunteers, renamed the Irish Republican Army, soon developed. The Royal Irish Constabulary was supplemented by new troop arrivals from England, including a controversial body of veterans generally known as the 'Black and Tans.'

In the north, during 1920, a new Special Constabulary was established, dominated by former Ulster Volunteer Force men and new Unionist recruits. Throughout Ulster, and especially in Belfast, there was widespread sectarian violence as fear mounted. An act of the British parliament established partition with a separate Unionist parliament and government for the six counties of Northern Ireland. A truce between the IRA and the British in 1921 led to an important treaty which was signed at the end of that year. However, violence continued in the north during 1922.



The 16th Irish Division of the British Army, containing many Nationalists

The treaty was a controversial one, the end result of which was a clear confirmation of partition, with a new Northern Ireland parliament set up in Belfast and an Irish Free State created in Dublin. The southern state was officially part of the British Empire and, for this among other reasons, a deadly civil war developed over whether or not to accept the compromises which had been made. That civil conflict abated in the following year.

The partition of Ireland left unhappy minorities on both sides of the border, including Unionists from those three counties of Ulster who found themselves to the south of the new dividing line. In the north, where a third of the population was Catholic and Nationalist, the



Casualties of the gas attack at Hulloch, where numerous Irish soldiers died in April 1916

Northern Ireland state would feel like an alien place. However, the conflicts and challenges experienced in Ireland, north and south, were more than matched by similar developments in a Europe that was recovering from one terrible war, only to move alarmingly towards another by 1939.

THE FIFTIETH ANIVERSARY IN 1966

In 1966, the 50th anniversary of the Rising was an opportunity for the Irish Republic to celebrate its origins but also to look with hope towards a brighter future. The Irish premier Sean Lemass saw himself as a moderniser and in the various commemorative events there was a strong emphasis on instilling optimism and dynamism in the youth of the country as well as staying true to the values of the 1916 leaders.

The grand parade past the General Post Office during Easter Week was the highlight of the commemorations, and 600 veterans of the Rising and the War of Independence were in attendance. A new Garden of

Remembrance was opened in Dublin, and throughout the state there were pageants, concerts and TV programmes to mark the occasion. Religious services were dominated by the Catholic Church whose ethos dominated daily life in the Republic.

In Northern Ireland an official commemoration of the Ulster Division's participation in the Battle of the Somme was held in July. Veterans of 'Carson's Army' were on display. Many in Unionist ranks had feared the consequences of allowing northern Nationalists to commemorate the Rising that Spring; however parades and ceremonies were allowed to go ahead, both in West Belfast and other rural locations.



The partition of Ireland became a concrete reality between 1920 and 1922

The tone of the speeches made on public platforms in Ulster was sometimes a defiant one. One speaker in Toomebridge expressed his reluctance to live any longer in 'half-slavery'. In Coalisland, a speaker urged the youth to 'be prepared to fight for the freedom of their country' as the men had done in 1916.

In the summer of 1966, after commemorative events had concluded, a newly formed organisation carrying the familiar name of the Ulster Volunteer Force carried out fatal attacks on Catholic individuals and damaged Catholic property. And although the modernising, international optimism of the 1960s still pervaded in many circles in Northern Ireland, there were some voices calling for stout resistance to the perceived threat of a new 'Easter Rising' in the north.

Other voices called for a new campaign for civil rights in Northern Ireland, aimed at improving the lot minority. Three years later, the Troubles would erupt.



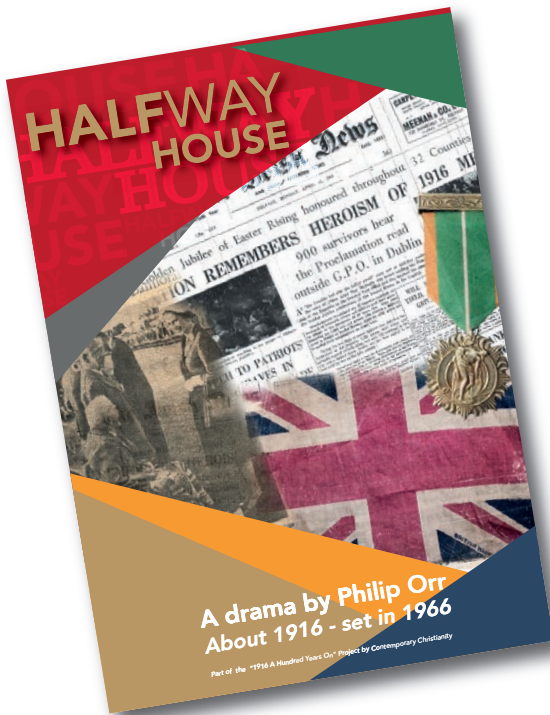
An IRA Flying Column, which waged guerilla war in Ireland.

2016 – TWO DRAMATIC PLAYS TO PROMPT DISCUSSION

In a divided society such as ours, individuals rarely have a clear, unimpeded view of the past, despite the efforts of historians. The past is rarely seen through a clear window-pane. It is more likely to be seen through a prism or in a mirror. The past usually comes to us as a narrowed beam of light, passed through the aperture of family history and viewed in the mirror of our current political loyalties.

In order to prompt conversation about the significance of Easter 1916, two dramas have been constructed. "HALFWAY HOUSE" looks at the events of that year in Dublin and The Battle of the Somme, on the Western Front, through the lens of 1966. "STORMONT HOUSE RULES!" looks at the Easter 1916 Proclamation through the lens of our current political animosities. Both scripts are available www.contemporarychristianity.net

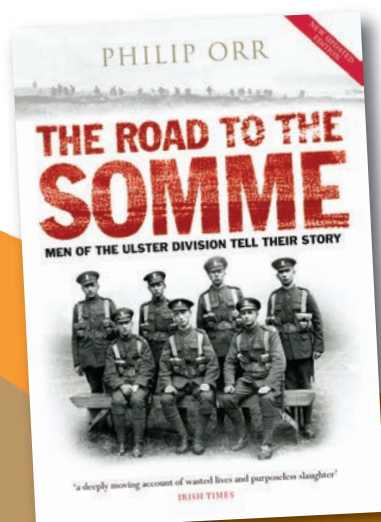
Hopefully, these two dramas will help each one of us reflect on the ways in which the past is transmitted to the present. They may also make us ponder how our current political, cultural and religious activities will be understood and appropriated in the future.



STORMONT HOUSE RULES!

An explosive debate
between two rival
politicians on the subject
of 1916 legacy.

A drama by Philip Orr.



Philip Orr has written 'The Road to the Somme'.
Men of Ulster tell their story.

"An immensely important book."

Irish Press

SOME QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE OF USE IN DISCUSSION, AS A REPOSE TO THE PLAYS.

"HALFWAY HOUSE"

Play:

- What did you learn which you didn't know?
- Does anything in your family history resonate with these stories?
- Can you see any hope in the characters, dialogue and events within this play?

"The Troubles":

- How does the Play help you to better understand "the Troubles"?

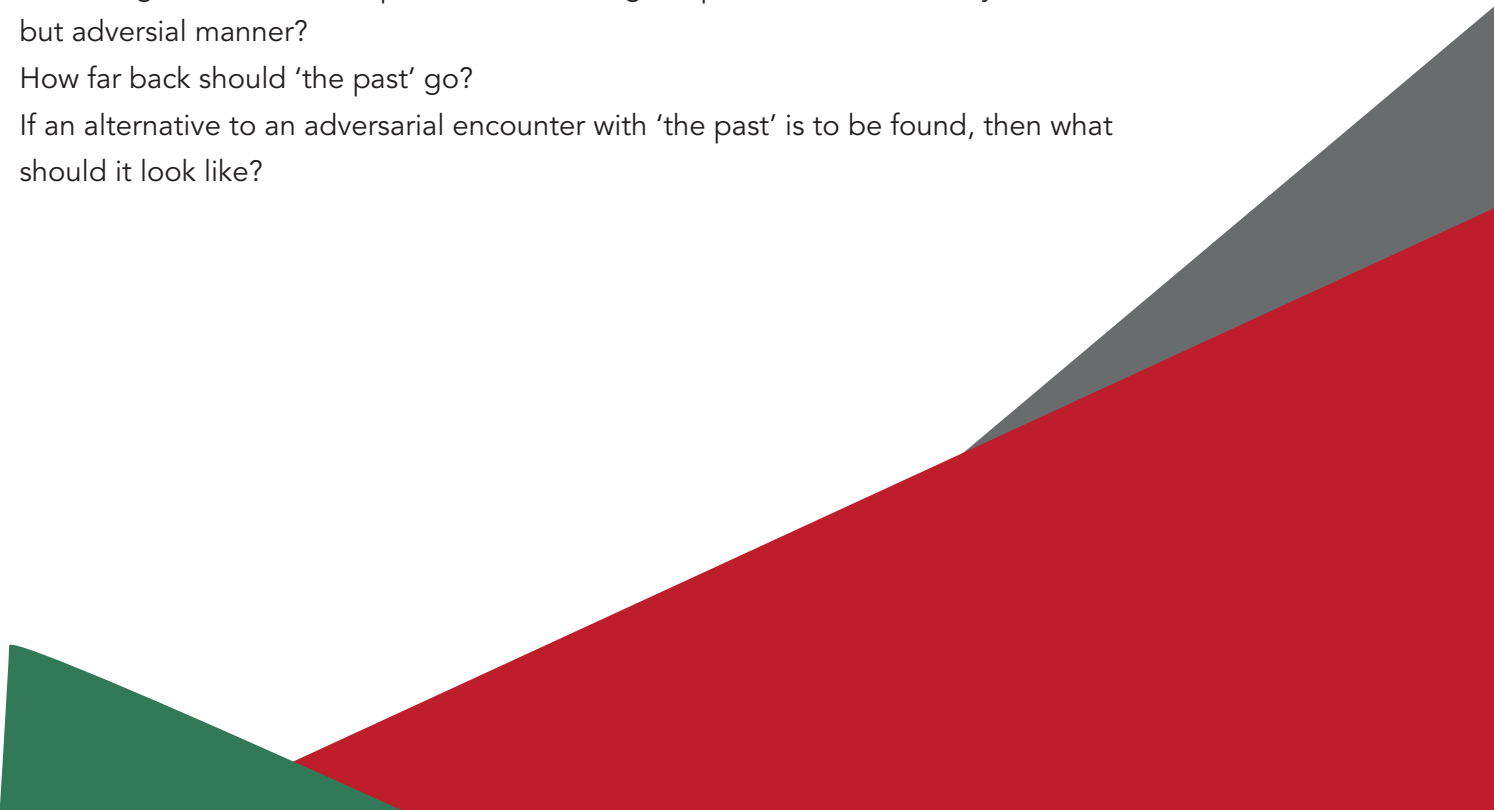
Commemorations:

- How should the events of 1916 -the Easter Rising and the Somme be commemorated in 2016?

"STORMONT HOUSE RULES!"

- It is often assumed that if 'two communities' should learn more about their own history and each other's history it would help lessen the bigotry;
- It is often stated that there have to be 'difficult conversations' across the divide if we are to 'move on';
- It is often lamented that most of our politicians are lacking in willingness, and the power of articulate debate, when it comes to legacy issues;
- Yet it is well-known that resolving to deal with 'the past' was a key part of the Stormont House Agreement.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Is learning more about 'the past' and discussing the past a valuable activity if it is conducted in an articulate but adversarial manner?
 - How far back should 'the past' go?
 - If an alternative to an adversarial encounter with 'the past' is to be found, then what should it look like?
- 

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NOEL McCUNE

(Chairman Contemporary Christianity, January 2012)



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