**Who is my neighbour? Religious and Sectarianism. (Ireland)**

**by Robert Wray**

Abstract

Within both the Old and the New Testament we are constantly reminded that God desires his people to live in harmony with one another. Scripture tells us 'you are to love your neighbour as yourself', (Mark 12:31) but who is your neighbour? I intend to investigate the biblical concept of neighbour and how that concept may be relevant today. I shall examine the impact that religion has had on the Christian message of love and compassion for your fellow human being. Ireland, although culturally and socially a Christian country, has suffered great sectarian injustice and violence. Historical sectarianism is still widespread throughout Ireland, the foundations of which can be found in the colonisation of Ireland by the English Crown. Although culturally and socially Ireland believes itself to be a Christian country, it is this devotion to religion that divides the population. Schism within Christianity, due to theological differences in the interpretation of Scripture, has led to the development of institutionalised Christian religions which consider themselves to be distinct from other Christian religions. The reformation was imposed on Ireland by the English Crown, resulting in the Protestant faith being viewed as that of the conqueror and the Roman Catholic faith as that of the conquered. This concept of religion has led to continuous outbreaks of sectarian violence, which have added to the fear and mistrust between the Roman Catholic and Protestant sections of the community. If Ireland, and Northern Ireland in particular, are to enjoy a period of sustainable peace the different religious communities must be reconciled with each other. I shall explore reconciliation within Scripture and the practical measures taken to achieve the breakdown of barriers between social groups. Within this dissertation I will study only a small part of the complex structure that is sectarianism, drawing on my own experiences and those of the community in which I live.