Religion and Politics in Contemporary Ireland

by DAVID N. HEMPTON

> *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare . . . . for I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*
> Jeremiah 29:7-11

> *Religious ideas have the fate of melodies, which, once set afloat in the world are taken up by all sorts of instruments, some of them woefully coarse, feeble or out of tune, until people are in danger of crying out that the melody itself is detestable.*
> George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*[1]

There are few places on earth where religious melodies are played with coarser instruments than in Northern Ireland, especially when it comes to matters of faith and politics. Consequently, there is now a whole generation of young people committed either to violence or to religious cynicism. More than that, cynicism is married to hopelessness, because any rational evaluation of Ulster's problems is bound to be pessimistic, due to the irreconcilable objectives of its citizens, the historical weight of generations of conflict, the polarization that violence always brings, a crumbling economy, and the apparent inability of churches to offer any real hope. This sense of despair has grown in recent months in the wake of the hunger strike, and the realisation that our thirteen years of conflict will almost certainly continue into the foreseeable future. To be thought of as realistic in Ulster political life it is apparently necessary to manifest hopelessness and despair, yet the Christian ought to be familiar with another kind of vocabulary, with words like hope, salvation, redemption, love and grace. This tension between external pessimism and internal hope is the most profound difficulty facing Christians in N. Ireland and relates closely to the sufferings of Christ, particularly on the cross, where a similar tension between love and despair resulted in the one truly hopeful event in the world's history.

This paper cannot hope to deal with new political initiatives, or the strengths and weaknesses of the political parties, or what went wrong in the past. There are in any case dozens of different views on these questions and the past cannot be undone. We must learn to crawl before we can walk, so there is a need to go back to proper theological principles to begin to clear our minds of years of prejudice and cultural conditioning. We also need to demolish before we can create.

I believe there are at least seven wrong ways to think about the relationship between religion and politics, all of which are detectable in this province, and all are doubly dangerous because they have at least a grain of truth in them. In this area, partial truths are generally more hazardous than lies.

1. The Sin and Sit it out Philosophy

This view is based on an over-developed theology of the fall, and consequently, an under-developed theology of redemption. Since human nature it totally corrupt, it is argued, one should expect nothing but chaos in this world. Therefore, our calling is to endure with patience until Christ returns. To engage in political and social action is really to waste one's time; far better to withdraw from a sinful world, save individual souls, and think expectantly of eternity. This view was particularly strong amongst nineteenth century pre-millennialists and ultra-Tories, and a modified version of it still survives within that theological and political tradition. The weakness of this tradition is that it undervalues God's continuing interest in His creation, and the role we are commanded to play as salt and light in restraining evil, keeping alive hope, and playing our part in God's gracious desire for redemption.

Think of Jeremiah 29. The year is about 595 B.C., Jerusalem has fallen to the Babylonians and captives have been taken into exile. A number of false prophets spoke of a speedy return for the exiles, but Jeremiah thought otherwise. According to him the exile would last seventy years, and those years were not to be endured in gloomy despair or suicidal disillusionment. Quite the opposite (see v.7). For the Christian, who is, in a sense, in exile in this world, it ought to be possible to embrace the world without necessarily falling in love with it. If we fail to commit ourselves positively to the improvement of things around us (including politics and society) then we end up with stunted personalities ourselves, and scare off potential talent which can find no expression in dowdy and sullen churches.

Moreover, it is an inescapable fact that we, as Christian citizens in a democracy, cannot avoid political action (in the widest sense) even if we wanted to. A non-vote is a political act in favour of the status quo, and whether we vote or not, we pay taxes which governments spend for us. We all have to act politically, and as Christians, we ought to do so on the basis of Christian criteria.

2. Unrealistic Liberalism

In the past thirteen years there have been many platitudinous comments from predominantly liberal (with a small l) politicians and church leaders that reconciliation, being stronger than conflict, must succeed in the end. These comments are, of course, well intentioned, but their mixture of Western bourgeois liberalism, political romanticism and middle-class paternalism, is simply not realistic. Those who hold this view of the world create fictions e.g. that there is a huge fund of goodwill and moderation which somehow never

gets expressed. Repeated election results give the lie to this kind of optimism. Make no mistake about it, we cannot make progress in this country until it is recognised that there are *real* issues dividing people, that cannot be etherised by words like dialogue and aspirations.

I wish to be careful here. I am not devaluing commendable attempts to bring communities together, nor am I advocating the retreat of churches into denominational ghettos. Who knows what state this nation might be in if it were not for innumerable attempts to bring people together in churches, youth clubs, prayer groups, house fellowships, community centres, schools, and so on. However, we must not deduce from all this that a surge of goodwill *in itself*, will result in peace and stability, when the issues are so intractable. We need a strong dose of realism and historical sophistication in these matters. Conflict and violence, in the past, have been disturbingly influential in shaping the political destiny of nations, including ours.

We need to mix realism with love, in a way that perhaps only Christ has exemplified. He never avoided confrontation (sometimes bitter and protracted), but he never abandoned love. Somehow enmity must be embraced. Irreconcilable objectives must be seen as such. In short, Christian love and truth must not be allowed to degenerate into wishful thinking and idealism.

3. *The Politicisation of the Gospel or the Gospelisation of Politics*

Edward Norman, in his 1979 Reith Lectures, "Christianity and the World Order"[2], argued that Western Christianity had married the Gospel to a political and social ideology comprising elements of Western liberalism and pseudo-marxism. This marriage, according to Norman, has condemned the Western churches to inexorable decline. Paradoxically, the more the churches have striven to show that they are modern and intellectually in tune with the rest of the world, the more pronounced has been their decline. Not content with ruining the authentic Gospel message in the West, Norman alleges that liberal and marxist notions have now been introduced into South America and Africa, via theological education and cultural imperialism.

Norman is *not* arguing that Christians should have nothing to do with politics, but rather that we must be careful not to make political ideas part of the Gospel message itself. To take a crude example, when Christ is portrayed as a kind of left-wing revolutionary figure then that, says Norman, is politicising the Gospel. This is not the place to debate whether Norman's analysis of Christianity and the world order is correct or not. In my view his emphasis on the spiritual and eternal dimensions of the Christian faith have been as timely as his understanding of third world realities has been shallow. Nevertheless, his central thesis is easily applied to Northern Ireland. When a Protestant says 'for God and Ulster' or when a Catholic says 'for God and Ireland', they are, in fact, politicising the Christian message. Protestant fundamentalism and Catholic nationalism have been equally guilty in

supposing that God has sanctified their national and cultural prejudices. Of course all of us have personal preferences about what kind of cultural environment suits us best, but to pretend that God loves us more deeply because of these preferences is theological arrogance bordering on blasphemy. When a Protestant says that his faith is dependent on the maintenance of Stormont, he is, in fact, declaring that he has no faith at all. When a nationalist pins his faith on a united and Catholic Ireland, he is, in fact, reviving one of the oldest and most destructive heresies in Christendom—that is the marriage of a religious establishment to a national identity.

Just as serious a problem standing in the way of peaceful progress is the infusion of political ideas with misplaced religious zeal. Consider, for example, this comment by Conrad Russell on the English civil war in the seventeenth century.

Even with real political skill on all sides, a settlement would have been very difficult to achieve. Yet it could only be made harder by the astonishingly unpolitical method in which most of the parties concerned pursued it. Fear and idealism made a bad mixture, and it could only make the situation more difficult that most of the parties concerned had an uncompromising determination to achieve things which could not possibly be. [The leading protagonists who were all imbued with religious and political idealism] belonged to that school of thought which holds that the proposition that politics is the art of the possible is not merely open to abuse, but actually sinful[3].

Christians who get themselves involved in politics must recognise that politics and theology are not about exactly the same things. The former depends on calculation and accommodation whereas the latter rightly emphasises absolutes. Once again there is need for care here, because politics, as anyone who reads election manifestoes knows well, is not free from unrealistic idealism. Moreover, I am not advocating the divorce of Christian principles from political participation. In fact, my complaint about Irish politics and religion is not their interconnection; but their inadequacy, as presently joined, to deal with the problems facing us. The proper Christian approach to politics should be based on genuine biblical principles and not on our cultural preoccupations with sex and Sunday. This means serious Bible study on the social application of concepts like justice, righteousness, grace and the kingdom of God. This will be difficult, even painful, but if we are to be taken seriously we can no longer afford to give fundamentalist answers to extraordinarily complicated problems. This is not mere accommodationism, nor is it a trendy Ulster version of liberation theology; it is simply a plea for Christian relevance and integrity.

4. *Triumphalism and Tribalism*

This kind of political behaviour plays on people's fears, hatreds, credulities, insecurities, prejudices and ambitions. In other words it feeds the

very things that militate against genuine spiritual progress. Whereas in the New Testament there is much about esteeming others, loving one's neighbour, and denying self, the politics of triumphalism are essentially self-assertive. As a result, many Ulster men and women are religious schizophrenics. This serious spiritual illness goes undiagnosed in churches with a vested interest in maintaining sectarianism. The politics of triumphalism merge with the Irish love of showmanship and melodrama in things like papal visits, Carson trails, Orange processions, Hibernian parades and Apprentice Boys' marches. Many of these things are harmless enough in themselves, but melodies of belligerence and tribal domination are closely mixed up with the processional rough music of both Catholics and Protestants. What a pity it is that our festivals are so provocative to the opposition. Politics based on triumphalism and domination can undoubtedly produce a certain kind of peace and stability, through fear, but they can never produce respect and justice. As such it is difficult to see how Christians can travel on this road without burning at least some pages in their Bibles.

5. Equivocation over Violence

It is a truism in Irish history that violence usually pays dividends. It is inconceivable that the changes which have taken place in Northern Irish government and society in the past two decades could have been achieved by any other method than violence. In the twentieth century terrorism has become international because it has been staggeringly successful as a vehicle for political and social change. Yesterday's terrorists are often today's reputable politicians.

In Ireland, because the link between power and violence is so close, political and ecclesiastical leaders have often flirted with terrorist organisations—if only by implication. The Irish people, in general, are terribly flawed in this respect. We always seem to create unheroic heroes. In my view, although violence may be the way of power and influence, it is unequivocally not the way of the cross. Christ's rôle as the suffering servant is one of the most humbling and moving examples in history—so clear is the example that Christians have little choice but to follow it. It is hard for a realistic person, Christian or otherwise, to reject the most powerful weapon he has—violence—in return for almost certain failure. Hard, but absolutely necessary. There must be an end to ecclesiastical equivocation over violence, from wherever it comes (recent signs have been encouraging in this respect). But further, it is up to governments and to majorities to ensure that there is enough scope for peaceful political change to make violence the social outcast it undoubtedly is. Those who provoke violence are just as guilty as those who engage in it.

6. The Politics of No Responsibility

When one finds oneself in a political and social mess, there is a very natural temptation to allocate blame. So, depending on whose views you listen to, our problems have been caused by the politicians, the British

government, Tory economic policies, the Dublin government, the Catholic Church, the army and other security forces, the provisional I.R.A. or the U.D.A.. The difficulty with this approach is that it leaves little room for self-criticism or fresh analysis. Now if this were simply a history paper it would be comparatively easy to give solid and fairly convincing historical explanations for Ireland's current plight. But explanations don't change anything, and being an historian simply makes it easier to justify one's own pessimism about Ireland's future. Being a Christian means that one doesn't always have to explain problems in terms of *other* people's wrongdoing. Moreover, a healthy self-criticism combined with the imaginative ability to understand why the other person thinks as he does, are virtues commended to us in the New Testament. No doubt all this sounds too individualistic and wishy-washy, but unless we can get to the point where Irish people recognise that our problems are partly the responsibility of every citizen and not just the malevolent creation of small coteries, then we are not thinking Christianly about politics and society, or about ourselves. True enough, in a complex Western society individuals seem unimportant, but even when the ballot box opens up a rare opportunity to influence events, Irish people have consistently shown that they love a dark past more than the possibility of a new future. Our churches (Protestant and Catholic), as collective distributors of Christian information, have failed to educate the Irish population in areas where it matters most—in relationships, family life, social concerns, financial responsibilities and politics.

7. *The Search for the Holy Grail*

The fact is that Northern Irish citizens have been dealt a dead hand by generations of unfortunate decisions, missed opportunities and shady compromises. Thus, what we have now is a remarkably complex set of problems, conflicts and mutually incompatible aspirations. Let us admit, then, that in the present climate there are no easy structural or political devices which can somehow paper over the cracks in our society. In fact, looking for a conventional structural solution, accompanied by frequent elections, is itself part of the problem.

It is difficult to think of any future scenario as favourable to a reconciliation of Northern Ireland's split community as the political events of 1973-4, when the power sharing executive was sent on its way with the full backing of the British civil service. W. D. Flackes has stated that

. . . . .the Faulkner Unionists, S.D.L.P. and Alliance had a real majority in the Assembly to back the power-sharing Executive in its initial stages. Not the new magic figure of 70 per cent, but still around 50 of the 78 seats. The Executive was not simply founded on the ingenuity of William Whitelaw in smoke-filled rooms at Stormont Castle.

But it was the product of very special circumstances. If there was fear and uncertainty among Unionists about the future of the U.K. link, the S.D.L.P. in 1973 were solidly behind British thinking on power-sharing and the re-discovered Council of Ireland. They were a largely united minority force, and

achieved the remarkable result in that election of taking 19 seats and having only one lost deposit from 28 candidates. In a sense, the old roles had been reversed—Unionists were fighting Westminster and new-style Nationalists had shown themselves willing allies of a British Government.[4]

My point is that even in these 'very special circumstances' a partnership government could not survive the strains imposed on it by loyalist pressure. In the wake of the hunger strike, and with the undisputed electoral power of the D.U.P. and Sinn Fein, it is difficult to imagine such favourable conditions returning for the foreseeable future.

Thus, the dead hand of our past is upon us, or as Canon John Baker wrote, 'theologically it bears all the distinguishing marks of true evil, namely that there is no right answer to the problems it poses'.[5] There is no rational step forward that is not open to fatal objections, and social and political engineering cannot solve the problems. In fact the only thing that really unites republicans and loyalists, British and Irish, is our inability to offer even a plausible, never mind successful, answer to the misery of Northern Ireland. Our own answers, bred out of our own group histories, are no good. But instead of recognising this fact, the party manifestoes for the recent assembly elections seemed intent on looking back to past events.

It is relatively easy, of course, to analyse the mistakes of the past and the present, but it is remarkably difficult to say anything new or hopeful about N. Ireland's political outlook. It is equally difficult, even amongst Christian people, to arrive at any consensus as to future directions. In the sure knowledge, however, that old pathways have not served us well I wish to make five points of a more positive nature.

1. Our Theology must be right

Christians who are aware of human sinfulness and God's graciousness ought never to be sullenly pessimistic or naïvely optimistic about this world. A proper theology of creation, fall and redemption should make us committed to the world, but with realistic objectives about what can be achieved in it. However, it is absurd for Christians, who believe that God's grace is the centre of the Christian faith, to abandon hope in their daily lives—even in political matters.

'For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future *and a* hope.'
Jer. 29:11

'Human fallibility is not to be denied, but it is not what Christianity is, or ought to be, "about". To deduce from human ambiguities and corruption the "worthlessness of all earthly expectations" is to deny grace and make man rather than God determinative in the world. The substance of Christianity is not a "view of man" but believing in God and participation in his life by the Spirit. Consequently, the pivot of Christianity in the world is not the fall but redemption . . . . The Fallenness of man is a universally pervasive power but it has been limited and unsettled by God the redeemer.[6]

How can we, who have discovered grace in our own personal lives, deny the possibility of grace operating on a wider community level? In God's world there is always a 'future' and a 'hope' until he chooses to wind it up.

2. *Penitence*

Paul Oestreicher, the ex-chairman of Amnesty International, stated in a public lecture at Queen's University Belfast, that neither a wave of goodwill nor an attitude of forgiveness could break the sectarian deadlock in this province. According to him what is required is penitence—both public and corporate. He said that it was difficult for the churches to admit guilt, but felt that the Roman Catholic Church for one needed to repent of its exclusivity (particularly in the areas of education and mixed marriages), and of its deliberate fostering of nationalism which has made it morally ambiguous on occasions over terrorist violence. In Oestreicher's view the first move should come from the ecclesiastically strong—the Roman Catholic church. Similarly, there is a need for the politically strong, the Protestant majority, to repent of its past discrimination in so many areas. What Protestant can boast of his conscience in these matters when it has taken such community destruction to alert us to things that were going on under our very noses?

We all know how powerful a healer penitence is in our spiritual lives and in our personal relationships. What marriage could exist for more than a few months without the word sorry? Yet how often have you heard a N. Ireland church leader or politician say 'I was wrong' or 'we made a mistake'? Only Gerry Fitt, over the issue of political status, had the moral courage to say that he had been wrong, and was rewarded by the virtual end of his political career. How sad it is that so few of us can distinguish between moral courage and weakness.

Of course penitence is costly and risky. It is not always reciprocated. But is it more risky than the growing spiral which aggression and self-assertion inevitably produce? In a sense, we are like two communities fighting over a loaf, which has now become a pile of crumbs. There can be no lasting peace in this province, however ingenious the political initiatives might be, until the sectarian deadlock is broken.

3. *Facing up to our History*

"Happy is the nation with no history" is an adage appropriate to Ireland, with so much history, so little of it happy. But such unhappiness allows room for myth, nostalgia and romanticism, so that few nationalities in the modern world are as preoccupied with their past as the Irish, even when their folk migrations have left Erin far behind. Moreover, preoccupation does not necessarily enlighten the understanding, instead it can often cement prejudices. Consequently the interpretation of Irish history is itself a matter of contention between republicans and unionists. What is indisputable however, is that what Professor Lyons has called 'the burden of our history' is upon us to an extent which the rest of the world finds puzzling and confusing. In

addition, unhelpful and frequently sensationalised media coverage of Ulster in the past fifteen years has encouraged international public opinion to regard the province as 'a place where bloodthirsty bigots of various obscure sects murder each other incessantly for reasons no sane man can fathom'[8].

In such limited space it is impossible to do justice to the complex historical roots of the current instability in Ireland which would alone convince the 'sane man' that the Irish are not congenitally troublesome, but have been victims of historical circumstances not always of their own making. Rather I intend to concentrate on two fundamental problems that have been bequeathed to us by our past; the first relates to the cultural diversity of the people living in Ireland, and the second concerns the impact of extra-Irish agencies.

Past patterns of settlement and religious practice have left an indelible imprint on modern Ireland. Professor Lyons is thus able to analyse the Irish problem in terms of four different, and often conflicting, cultures: Anglo-American, Gaelic, Anglo-Irish and Presbyterian. His argument is that Ireland's current plight is largely due to the fact that 'over the last hundred years few people have tried to relate political solutions to cultural realities'.[9] One might add that Irishmen of all cultural backgrounds have been more interested in fighting for dominance than in learning how to live at peace with different kinds of people. Such conflict carries its own penalty however, because the major cultural groups in Ireland have become inexorably more defensive, strident and unappealing. This in turn makes political accommodation more difficult and so the spiral goes on.

A second problem bequeathed to us by our past is the result of extra-Irish influences. For example, Desmond Bowen in his book *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland 1800-70*[10] states that Ireland's unhappy religious divisions were deepened in the nineteenth century by two expanding religious movements—Catholic Ultramontanism and British evangelicalism. Ireland was therefore a particularly intense microcosm of a global religious conflict, which has now almost abated in the rest of the world, but whose legacy lives on in this country.

Another outside factor in the current instability is the financial and emotional support given by Irish-Americans to violent republicanism. The unwillingness of Irish immigrants to cut their umbilical cord of anti-British sentiment is a psychological disorder that has cost far too many Irish lives. In short, those outside Ireland with a stake in its future, whether in Rome, London or New York, must not adopt political and ecclesiastical attitudes which only deepen the spiral of destruction, whatever their claims to the contrary. Irishmen must face up to the problems of their own history with honesty and integrity. This is hard enough without loading the dice from outside.

4. Acceptance of Realities

More practically, and perhaps more controversially, I believe that there can be no end to the present violence until everyone accepts, however

regretfully, that there is a border in this country. Whatever the historical reasons for its origin, and no matter how wistfully people may speculate on what might have been, the border has now existed for sixty years and is likely to survive at least until the end of this century. N. Ireland citizens must accept what they don't like until they can change it peacefully and by persuasion. From the nationalist point of view, while violence has certainly promoted changes within N. Ireland, it has irrevocably destroyed the possibility of Irish unity for a considerable period. From the unionist point of view, every fresh act of violence merely stiffens the resolve not to surrender to aggressive nationalism. Think again of the Jeremiah passage. The Jews had their city sacked by a foreign army and were carted off into exile in Babylonia, yet Jeremiah still writes—'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.'

Unfortunately in N. Ireland, boycott and discrimination are almost impossible to separate. Unfortunately also, those who have suffered most in the past thirteen years have been those living in areas where the nationalist dream has been propagated most fervently. Idealistic dreams, like all secular political fantasies, have now become gruesome nightmares for too many people. In this tiny European off-shore island, the time for dreams has surely ended, now it is time to seek the genuine welfare of *all* its people. Jeremiah was right. In seeking the welfare of the place in which we live, we also achieve our own welfare. That is not to say that people must give up their ultimate aspirations, any more than the Jews were asked to give up hope of a restoration, it is merely advocating the acceptance of a reality until circumstances can be changed peacefully. Moreover, this is not simply a sophisticated argument for the long-term maintenance of the *status quo*, any more than Jeremiah had a vested interest in maintaining Babylonian military dominance. For this idea to have any chance of success in N. Ireland, those entrusted with government must be seen to be governing in the interests of all its citizens and not just a favoured section, whether of class, religion or culture. In addition, we must recognise that other people's desires, though different from our own, are nevertheless legitimate. They are not wicked for holding them, though they are wicked in saying that they must have their desires met, by force if necessary.

One would hope also that within a more harmonious political climate, and within the context of the E.E.C., the border would be stripped of its more obviously divisive elements. Although it is admittedly disparate in its culture, this island is too small for rigid frontiers.

5. A deeper concern for the quality of life in church and society

In essence, the major division in Northern Irish society is not between unionists and republicans but between those who improve the quality of life for its citizens and those who demean it. The saddest thing of all about

sectarian politics and romantic nationalism is that more important issues of social and economic policy get relegated to the bottom of the pile. We live in a country of massive unemployment, appalling housing, urban decay, and all sorts of related social problems, yet these matters scarcely ever determine an election result. William Morris, the nineteenth century designer, poet and revolutionary socialist, argued that the quality of life of working people could not be secured by 'coercing certain families or tribes, often heterogeneous and jarring with one another, into certain artificial and mechanical groups, and call them nations, and stimulate their patriotism—i.e. their foolish and envious prejudices'[11]. From the other side of the political spectrum Brian Mawhinney, the Ulster born Conservative M.P. has stated that 'the tribal politics of intransigence is killing jobs just as surely as it is killing people'. He went on to say that if there was no change in our political and economic circumstances then 'unemployment will rise even further and even more idle hands will turn to violence, thus killing investment and jobs and confirming the vicious downward spiral'.[12]. To me our circumstances have all the characteristics of the judgement of God—namely, that if we persist in holding fundamentally evil attitudes then we can expect the fabric of our society to be torn apart.

Churches must also direct their attention to the quality of life both inside and outside their particular communities. The old links between religious denominations and tribal political loyalties must be broken. This will be exceptionally difficult, but there is a need for courageous church leaders to defy the traditional pressures that are put upon them and lead their people along happier paths. Even if this resulted in a numerical weakening of the churches, which I do not believe would happen, it would greatly increase the moral and spiritual credibility of such organisations in the eyes of the world. God's new society, the church, must be faithful to the word of God and put its own house in order in these matters. It is time for the Christian churches in the province to be part of the solution rather than being contributors to the problem. Or to use George Eliot's image, we Christians in Ireland must cease to play religious melodies with coarse musical instruments. If we refuse then we must expect people, both in Ireland and further afield, to declare that the melody itself is detestable. Who would blame them? Secondly, we must hope that God's new society will have a beneficial impact on our national life. Nevertheless, even if Ireland continues in turmoil for another century, how sweet it would be if God's people were able to witness effectively to the love of God 'which binds everything together in perfect harmony'. Because, as things stand at present, the secular world mocks our piety and our pretentiousness. For Christians it is absolutely imperative that grace, penitence, love and forgiveness should overcome violence, triumphalism, moral ambiguity and prejudice.

Conclusions

When I gave a modified version of this paper at a recent conference in Belfast, an American theologian of South American extraction told me

afterwards that, although he disagreed with parts of it, he admired its mixture of grace and realism. I now believe that these qualities strike at the very heart of our predicament in Northern Ireland. Idealism, wishful thinking and false optimism must be banished from our minds along with despair and hatred. There are after all no easy solutions—what is needed is the patient development of a righteous and just society in which Christians must be prepared to take a lead, even if it should go against our cultural grain. It is appropriate to conclude with Canon Baker's words—'There are no structural devices which can hope to endure in the present climate, or even to be accepted. It is the air itself which has to be changed.'[13]

NOTES

1. In the short story *Janet's Repentance* (Penguin, 1973).
2. The lectures were printed in *The Listener* between 2 November and 7 December 1978. They were subsequently published as a book by Oxford University Press in 1979.
3. Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments: English History 1509-1660* (Oxford, 1971), pp 376-7.
4. *Fortnight*, no. 188 (October 1982), p.4.
5. John Baker, unpublished study notes entitled 'Ireland and Northern Ireland' (January, 1981)
6. Haddon Willmer, 'Does Jesus call us to Political Discipleship?' in Willmer et al., *Christian Faith and Political Hopes* (London, 1979), pp. 123-4.
7. Any serious attempt to understand Ireland should begin with its history. The following studies are recommended: J. C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London, 1966); Patrick Buckland, *The Factory of Grievances: Devolved Government in Northern Ireland 1921-39* (Dublin, 1979), and *A History of Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1981); Robert Kee, *Ireland* (London, 1980); F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1973), and *Culture and Anarchy in Modern Ireland* (London, 1979); A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis* (London, 1967); and J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923-1970* (Dublin , 1971).
8. F. S.L. Lyons, *The Burden of our History* (Belfast, 1979), p.26.
9. *Ibid.*, p.14.
10. (Dublin, 1978).
11. William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (London, 1891), ch. 14.
12. An address to businessmen in Belfast (1982).
13. Baker, *op.cit.*

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