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the Northern Ireland situation; something which could be ended unilaterally by Britain’s simply withdrawing her army and her governmental institutions. This is to ignore the fact that there are in Northern Ireland roughly 1 million people - who have been on this island for more than three hundred years, and who form a rightful and permanent pan of Irish reality - who owe allegiance to Britain; they profess a British identity, claim British citizenship, and demand the presence and protection of the British Army, which they see as ‘their army’. These rightful inhabitants of this island of Ireland are a ‘British pres­ence’ in Ireland. They are a ‘British dimension’ in Ireland. Indeed, in the most relevant sense of that term, they are *the* ‘British presence’ in Ireland.

In the words of the poet, John Hewitt, they can say:

For we have rights drawn from the soil and sky;

the use, the pace, the patient years of labour, the rain against the lips, the changing light, the heavy clay-sucked stride, have altered us; we would be strangers in the Capitol; this is our country also, no-where else; and we shall not be outcast on the world.

[from ‘The Colony’, in *The Selected John Hewitt,* Blackstaff Press, 19811 These unionists feel that they gained liberation and self-deter­mination when the Northern state was set up; they see those values as diminished and threatened now; they currently view the republican physical force campaign as an attack upon their community and a threat to its rights and its freedoms and an attempt to coerce them into unwilling submission.

No future for Ireland is conceivable or could be just that does not take account of their feelings, that does not respect their rights, that does not offer hope of securing their consent. No talk of ‘British withdrawal’, from whatever source it comes, is either politically meaningful or morally admissible that does not take cognisance of the rightful presence in Ireland of this million people, and that does not provide a *modus convivendi,* acceptable to them as well as to the Northern minority, whereby the unionist and the nationalist communities can live together

in mutual respect for one another’s just rights. No political solution for Northern Ireland, no political blueprint for the future of the whole of Ireland, can be taken seriously that does not offer realistic hopes of securing agreement from the union­ist population, and point to feasible ways of convincing them of the rightness and the value, for themselves too, of whatever settlement is proposed.

I have said that the so-called ‘British dimension’ is internal to Northern Ireland. But it is equally true that the ‘Irish di­mension’ is internal to Nonhem Ireland. It is embodied in the hearts and minds of well over half a million Ulster people who are as much part of Northern Ireland as Ulster loyalists are. Their sense of Irishness is as rightful and as valid as is the loyalists’ sense of Britishness. The vast majority of them totally reject violence as a way of advancing their Irish nationalist aims. Their tradition, their peaceful aspiration, are no threat to anyone. Their aspiration is peacefully and lawfully expressed; and it should be peacefully accepted and constitutionally rec­ognised as pan of what defines Northern Ireland. The expression of it is, indeed, a fundamental human right, and should be accepted as such.

In Northern Ireland each of our divided communities has had its own vision, pursued its own aspirations, to the exclusion of the other community’s vision and aspirations; each has im­plicitly or overtly located its own utopia in a place free of the disturbing presence of the other. A united Irish nationalist Ire­land with no British presence; a united British and unionist Ulster with no Irish or nationalist dimension - both visions have been pursued with fanatical dedication and often through the blood and tears of others down many decades of our his­tory. One person’s vision has been another’s nightmare.

Northern Ireland’s problem is that of how to find ways of sharing two traditions, not ways of suppressing one or other tradition, or of subordinating one to the other. It is a problem of giving political expression to two equally valid loyalties, which each have an equally valid historic and moral right to be, and to be constitutionally recognised as being, an integral pan of

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Northern Ireland. Recognition of two Ulster loyalties, two Ul­ster identities, is an indispensable precondition of any solution to the complex problems of Northern Ireland.

Past constitutional arrangements

The tragedy of Northern Ireland is that it has never been given constitutional arrangements that are appropriate to the political composition of its population. Its unionist population is too large to be absorbed into a united Ireland conceived on unitary nationalist lines. Its nationalist population is too large to be absorbed into a Northern Ireland conceived on unitary union­ist lines. It was, however, precisely a unitary and univocally unionist and British constitutional model that was devised for Northern Ireland at the creation of the state. This constitution was appropriate to the unionist part of its population, but by no means to its nationalist pan.

Northern Ireland was defined as an integral and inseparable pan of the United Kingdom (uk), and its citizenship was de­fined as British. This definition coincides exactly with the defi­nition of the Union. This in turn coincides exactly with the statement of unionist political principles. This is a natural and just expression of unionist aspirations and a safeguard of the rights of the unionist pan of the population. But it ignores completely the aspirations and the rights of the nationalist population, which is by definition non-unionist. Under the Northern Ireland constitution, nationalists could not, while re­maining nationalists, give unqualified endorsement to the con­stitution, which was a British and unionist one. They could not hope to share in government unless they exchanged their na­tionalist convictions for unionist ones. It is a basic injustice in any country’s constitution that it requires a citizen to change his or her political party before being allowed to share in the government of the state of which he or she is a citizen.

Historically, of course, the conception of the Northern Ireland state was based on the hypothesis that it would provide some form of power-sharing within the island of Ireland. In effect,

the British government of the time opted for a territorial form of power-sharing, with unionists being given control over the northeast of the island, where a unionist majority was assured, and nationalists being given control over the rest of the island, where the nationalist majority was unquestionable. This could fairly be claimed to have been a well-intentioned compromise. It may have seemed to the British administration at that time to be the best, if not the only possible, solution to an intractable problem. It was, in any case, not intended to be a permanent, but only a provisional, solution. It is untrue and unjust to say, as nationalists have sometimes done, that the resultant Stormont regime represented merely ‘sixty years of Stormont misrule’. That regime had substantial achievements to its credit in the economic and infrastructural, educational, social welfare and healthcare fields. Nevertheless, it had fundamental flaws, which revealed themselves from the very beginning of the history of the state.

The flaws might have been less ruinous if the section of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 providing for formal joint institutions for the whole island of Ireland had been imple­mented. Although at the beginning there were to be two parlia­ments and two governments in Ireland, the Act contemplated and afforded every facility for union between North and South, and empowered the two parliaments by mutual agreement and joint action to terminate partition and to set up one parliament and one government for the whole of Ireland. With a view to the eventual establishment of a single parliament, and to bring­ing about harmonious action between the two parliaments and governments, there was created a bond of union by means of a Council of Ireland, which was to consist of twenty representa­tives elected by each parliament, and a president nominated by the Lord Lieutenant. It was to fall to the members of that body to initiate proposals for united action on the part of the two parliaments and to bring forward these proposals in the respec­tive parliaments.

Tne ‘Irish dimension’, of which there has been so much said by both the British and the Irish governments and by Northern

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Ireland nationalists since 1972, is therefore not a new concept. It was formally recognised in the very Act of the British Parlia­ment from which the Northern Ireland state derived and a commitment to give it constitutional embodiment was contained in that same Act.

In the event, Northern Ireland was given a univocally British and unionist constitution, which made no constitutional con­cessions whatever to the nationalist community and its Irish identity and its aspiration towards an Irish rather than a British union. The division into two states was resorted to because the unionist minority in the island as a whole was too large to be peacefully governed, without its consent, within a united Ire­land conceived as a unitary nationalist state. The blunt practi­cal reality in Northern Ireland has been that the nationalist minority within Northern Ireland was and is too large to be peacefully governed without its consent within a Northern Ire­land conceived on unitary British and unionist lines.

A Northern Ireland conceived as a unitary British and unionist state has by definition to put a question mark over the legitimacy, the legality and the rights of its non-British and non-unionist people. To be a full and equal citizen of a country is to be fully committed to its constitution, its political institutions, its national symbols. It is a peculiarity of the Northern Ireland constitution in its present form that such an unqualified commitment in effect entails being no longer a nationalist but a unionist. To speak of ‘the Northern Ireland people’ or ‘the Ulster people’ when one really means the unionist community, to say, as some spokesmen repeatedly say, such things as ‘the Ulster peo­ple will never countenance a United Ireland’, is to exclude the nationalist people from legitimate citizenship, to define them as non-citizens, indeed as non-people.

The unitary or mono-political model of constitution on which the Northern Ireland state was created had, therefore, a fatal flaw from the beginning. Only a bi-political or bi-polar con­stitutional model could have worked or would be just to the rights of both communities and would permit reconciliation be­tween them. This flaw was compensated for in some respects in

practice by a government that made progress in some areas of administration and made contributions to the common good of both communities. Yet the constitution of itself created an all­pervading sense of alienation in the nationalist community. This sense was aggravated by the experience of inequality of civil and political rights and economic opportunities, and by the experi­ence of discrimination in housing, in employment and in promotion in both the public and the private sector. The Cameron Commis­sion officially acknowledged this, and successive reports of the Fair Employment Agency have supplied abundant documented evidence.

It is all of eighteen years since a British Conservative admin­istration published an analysis of the Northern Ireland situa­tion not altogether different from the analysis I have given above. The discussion paper or Green Paper, as it was called, published in October 1972 under the auspices of the then Secretary of State, William Whitelaw, and entitled *The Future of Northern Ireland: a paper for discussion,* said:

The special feature of the Nonhem Ireland situation was that the great divide in political life was not between different view­points on such matters as the allocation of resources and the determination of priorities, but between the two whole commu­nities. The ‘floating vote’ for which rival panies would normally compete was almost non-existent. Thus the relationship between the panies was not fluctuating and uncenain, but virtually fixed from one Election to another. Such a situation was unlikely to foster either sensitivity on the part of the permanent maiority, or a sense of responsibility on the pan of the permanent minority. [1-14, p. 5]

The same report went on to discuss claims of discrimination practised against the nationalist community by the unionist majority. It concluded:

What is incontestable is that the continuous and complete control of central government by representatives of the majority alone was virtually bound to give rise to such suspicions. *[Ibid.,* p. 5]

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Semantic confusions

The anomalous nature of the constitution and state of Northern Ireland is shown by the persisting difficulty in finding a completely satisfactory and acceptable name for the territory. ‘Northern Ireland’ has obvious and indeed glaring geographical anomalies. ‘Ulster’, used as coterminous for the territory, is unacceptable to nationalists because it excludes three Ulster counties. ‘The Province’ for unionists means a region of Britain, whereas for nationalists it means part of one of the four historic provinces of Ireland. The ‘Six Counties’ is offensive to unionists. ‘Occupied Ireland’ is unjust and menacing to unionists because it suggests that Irish unionists are foreign invaders who have no rights in Ireland. The term ‘Northern Ireland’ is the least unsatisfactory and is becoming generally accepted. Similar difficulty notoriously attaches to the name of Northern Ireland’s second city: to call it Derry or to call it Londonderry is not simply to specify a geographical location on the map, it is also implicitly to make a political statement.

The difficulties of nomenclature may seem trivial. But they have importance because they highlight the existence of two communities, with different senses of historical identity and of national self-definition. Some habitual British ways of describing Northern Ireland conceal this fundamental reality. When a government commitment is made to ‘maintaining the Union so long as the majority of people in Northern Ireland choose to be British’, it should never be forgotten that the spokesman is speaking only of unionists among the Northern Ireland popula­tion. He is not speaking of a political majority subject to electoral swings, as in a normal democratic society. Such ways of speak­ing obscure the real issues. They ignore the fact that a large section of the population do not ‘choose to be British’. Political justice requires that every time a guarantee and reassurance of their status and rights is given to unionists, it should be balanced by a parallel guarantee and reassurance to nationalists of their status and rights.

When, as is frequently the case, the terms ‘the people of

Northern Ireland or ‘the Ulster people’ are used as names for the unionist part of the population, similar obscuration of the real issue is entailed. Such terms in effect define the nationalist population as non-people. They deny the rights of nationalists to that which defines them as nationalists, their attachment to union with the rest of Ireland. ‘The people of Northern Ire­land’ is not solely or homogeneously a unionist people. Com­mitment to the union of Northern Ireland not with Britain but with the rest of Ireland is the very definition of nationalism, and to aspire and to work peacefully through the political proc­ess for that union is the defining characteristic of a nationalist. Nationalism, therefore, by its very definition has to imply some degree of estrangement from a constitution and institutions that are based exclusively and univocally on the principle of the Union; such a constitution and such institutions are by defini­tion unionist. Consequently, what looks like a normal and democratic statement about an ordinary electoral majority amounts in effect to the imposition of a univocally unionist constitution on the nationalist people, who comprise not far short of 40 per cent of the total population. For nationalists, to give full and final and unqualified commitment to the Union would be in effect to abandon nationalism and to become unionists. This is a plain consequence of the meaning and definition of terms. Many civic buildings throughout Northern Ireland have for several years now carried huge placards pro­claiming ‘ULSTER SAYS NO’. Surely to cover the civic buildings of this land, which belong to all its citizens, with party political slogans that ignore and deny the existence of 40 per cent of those citizens, is not only an injustice and an insult, it is a symptom of political glaucoma, an inability to see and recognise political realities.

It has more recently become common for official statements of British government policy to say that ‘Northern Ireland is British because and for as long as a majority of its people are determined to be British.’ This formulation is, for nationalists, a significant and welcome step forward from the previously stated position that ‘Northern Ireland is as British as Yorkshire.’

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Nevertheless, this formula also both overstates and understates reality. It identifies territory with people. It thereby constitu­tionally defines the territory in terms appropriate to its unionist inhabitants, and at the same time defines nationalists out of the territory of Northern Ireland.

What should be said is that the unionist people of Northern Ireland are British and have the right so to be and so to remain for as long as they are determined to be British. This right must be recognised by all and guaranteed. Nationalists within Northern Ireland have precisely equal rights to be and to remain Irish, for as long as they are determined to be Irish. As has been said recently, Northern Ireland ‘is not real estate but people’, and its people are deeply divided in terms of national identity and politico-national aspiration. This diversity must be reflected in constitutional arrangements and political institutions appropriate to and specific to the unique politico-national duality of its population.

No less objectionable and no less unjust, on the other hand, is the use of the term ‘the Irish people’, when it is used, as it often is, to refer to the whole population of Ireland. To speak of ‘the Irish people’s right to self-determination’ is in effect to define the unionist population as non-people. It is to deny the rights of unionists to that which defines them as unionists, their attachment to union with Britain. To declaim ‘the Irish people’s right to self-determination without foreign interference’ is tantamount to denying and ignoring the existence of 60 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland. This is equally unjust. It is similarly a disease of the political optic system, an inability to see large and conspicuous political facts. Republicans speak of‘the Irish people’ and their right to ‘self-determination and national sovereignty’ in terms that implicitly exclude the unionist community from membership of the Irish people and effectively define unionists out of existence. To have a rightful place in Ireland or to belong to the Irish people in these repub­licans’ terms, unionists would have to cease to be unionists, for Irish unionists by definition are natives of Ireland who see themselves also as British and who desire to remain politically

united with Britain. In other words, republicans identify geo­graphical Ireland with ‘the Irish people’, and go on to identify ‘the Irish people’ with the republican/nationalist people. This is quite simply to ignore the basic political reality of the population of Ireland - namely that it includes nearly 1 million people who belong to Ireland but claim also the right to belong to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and who are Irish people but define themselves also as British. The wilder rhetoric of republicanism declares that people who do not wish to belong to the Irish Republic should return to where they properly belong, namely to Britain.

In making comments, politicians have a duty to consider not only the impact of their remarks on their supporters but also the impact their words have on the other community. How are anti-violence nationalists to feel when they are implicitly identi­fied as a cause of ‘Ulster’s agony and instability’? How are union­ists to feel when they are identified as part of the ‘occupying forces’ in their own homeland? How will the hundreds of thou­sands of law-abiding and peaceloving members and supporters of the Gaelic Athletic Association throughout Northern Ireland and in Ireland as a whole feel when their great organisation is branded, as it has been, as ‘sympathising with terrorism’?

In present circumstances in Northern Ireland our politicians can surely be more careful in their use of language. If politi­cians cannot bring themselves to use language that promotes trust and respect between the two traditions, surely they could at least refrain from using language that gives offence and insult to one or other of the two traditions whose hope and desire are to share this land in peace and reciprocal respect.

Neither a preclusively unionist status for Northern Ireland nor an exclusively nationalist prescription for Northern Ireland will satisfy the requirements of justice or correspond with plain political realities. Neither will have the remotest chance of se­curing that minimum consensus that is a precondition for sta­bility and normality in society and that is a prerequisite for the long and hard struggle for economic survival which faces both communities.

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the two traditions

Justice ‘on conditions’

For more than sixty years, both communities have talked about the marvellous future of justice, equality and partnership we could have had in our country if only ‘the others’ had not done this or had done that, and about the marvellous future we could now have if ‘the others’ would only cease doing this or demanding the other. Unionists are repeatedly proclaiming what rights and benefits nationalists would enjoy if only they would give up the aspiration to a united Ireland and accept the forever unalterable and infrangible integrity of Northern Ireland as an integral pan of the United Kingdom. Nationalists are no less eloquent in proclaiming how generous nationalist Ireland would be to unionists if only they would ‘throw in their lot’, or ‘get around the table’, with their fellow Irishmen and work out the future of our country ‘without foreign interference’.

In reality, such speeches are camouflaged statements: by un­ionists that there can be reconciliation and peace, stability and prosperity in Northern Ireland only when nationalists cease to be nationalists - or else clear out of Northern Ireland; and by nationalists that there can be justice and peace, equality and prosperity in Ireland only when unionists cease to be unionists - or else clear out of Ireland. Both these positions simply run away from the reality that is Northern Ireland. Northern Ire­land is a society composed of two communities that have radi­cally conflicting conceptions of the national identity and future of the territory of the state. Both conceptions are equally legiti­mate political options, and have equal right to be pursued and propagated by peaceful democratic means. Further, the reality of Northern Ireland is that these two communities must find ways of coexisting in peace and equality with one another, without either community demanding of the other that it abne­gate its sense of nationhood or renege its political convictions.

The CHRISTIAN challenge

Words of peace and reconciliation are words of life. Words of binemess and violence are words of death. They conceal a

death wish, or they contain an implicit and symbolic murder wish. Those who refuse to dialogue with others, who will not accept the right of others to be different, who will trust or will share with only those ‘of our own kind’, are secretly wishing that the others were not there, were not alive; they are implic­itly willing their death. It is not just by an accident of speech that people say, ‘I will cut them dead.’ Something like a secret complicity with murder could lurk behind such phrases as, ‘Why don’t they all go back where they belong?’; ‘You can never trust any of them’; ‘We must finish this thing now, once and for all.’ These phrases can be ways of wishing death to thousands. This is why Christ said that the Commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ forbids us to hate; for hate is a wish that the hated one did not exist. It is a way of wishing him dead. Hate is a symbolic form of murder.

But the last word for Christianity is not death but life, not hate but love. Love was crucified, but it is risen and lives for ever in the One who says, ‘I was dead but I am alive and I am to live for ever and ever and I hold keys of death and of the under world’ (Apocalypse 1: 17). Because of him we cannot ever despair of peace with justice, reconciliation, forgiveness and love in Ireland. To despair of that would be to despair of God, who ‘in Christ is reconciling the world to Himself’. We are Christians because we have believed in love. As St John says, ‘We have known and put our faith in God’s love towards our­selves’ (1 John 4: 16).

To believe in God’s love towards ourselves is to believe also in God’s love towards others, even when they are different from ourselves. It is to believe in the rights of others to be different from ourselves. The wish to extinguish differences is secretly a wish to eliminate those who dare to differ. Reconcili­ation across accepted differences is a direct consequence of believing in ‘God’s love towards ourselves’.

The problems of Northern Ireland are political and social ones, for the solution of which the skill and dedication of po­litical and community leaders are urgently needed. In one sense it is the truth and indeed the whole truth to say that Christian

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love is the only answer. But love is not a substitute for justice. Love includes justice. Love needs laws, institutions, structures, embodying justice, penalising injustice. When situations and structures exist that militate against justice and impede human dignity and fulfilment, Christian love requires reforms. Re­forms in turn demand political action. The Christian call to love our fellow men and women includes the command to remove the conditions that make love unlikely and to build the sort of community structures in which love can grow. Love therefore must be given constitutional and political expression and legal formulation and social embodiment.

The present hour urgently requires politicians to deploy their utmost energies and skills in finding solutions to our critical community problems in Northern Ireland. The contribution of our present-day politicians could be a nobler act of patriotism than any that marks the pages of past history in Ireland. Their positive and peaceful and constructive leadership can be a real witness to Christian faith. Our fervent and continuous prayers will be with the political leaders on all sides, in both parts of Ireland and in Britain, that they may be worthy of the challenge and peril of this hour and that God may make them deserving of His Son’s beatitude:

Blessed are the peace-makers;

they shall be called sons of God.

(Matthew 5: 9)

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The political cost of peace

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