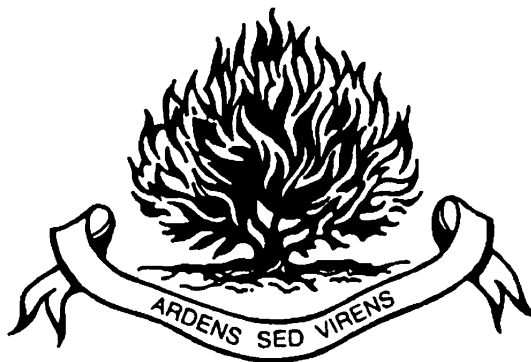


# THE SECOND CONVERSION OF DR. GEORGE DALLAS

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*an Irish Presbyterian story  
of courage and grace*

by Dr. Roddy Evans



Published in an edition of 500 copies

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ISBN: to come

Author: Evans, Roddy, Dr.

Title: The Second Conversion of Dr. George Dallas

Format: 138 mm x 214 mm

1999

Typeset in 11.5/15pt Adobe Garamond  
Printed by Nicholson & Bass Ltd, Belfast

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**“He helped us all to see our own situation in a new light, and challenged us to find the courage to acknowledge our common humanity . . . ”**

John Austin Baker,  
Bishop of Salisbury



## FOREWORD

**M**Y FIRST MEETING with Dr. George Dallas was on a Thursday evening of September 1983. He had come with his friends to Clonard Monastery for their Catholic/Protestant Bible Study.

The group met week by week. Pondering the Word of God together we sought to understand what God was asking of us in the midst of the deep-rooted violent conflict of nations and cultures which was causing so much suffering all around us.

Over the years the weekly Bible Study meeting was a great blessing to us all. For me it was the context of my ‘second conversion’. I remember the evening well. ’Twas in late July 1985 – our first meeting after the summer break. Only about six out of the regular twelve turned up. I was thinking “We have come back too early. We’ll not get much out of this evening’s meeting. Maybe we should wait until the full group is together”.

If any of the others had such thoughts they did not voice them. So we went ahead as usual. The Bible reading that evening was from chapter five of St. Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. As we sat in silence pondering the passage these words seemed to jump out at me from the page. *“What I mean is this, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding men’s misdeeds against them, and that he has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation”.*

Suddenly, I saw the truth about myself. I realised that I was the one who held their misdeeds against those who had ever wronged my nation and culture. My way of telling the terrible things the “other side” had done showed me how this was so. I was not living in the reconciling love that entered human history in Christ Jesus.

That evening the Spirit of God changed my heart and began to make room in it for all the people caught up in the unresolved relationship of Britain and Ireland and for all the congregations of the Christian Church alienated by the unresolved relationship of Catholic and Protestant.

Under God, I owe that “opening of my heart” to George Dallas and his friends – the Catholic and Protestant members of the Bible Study group. My life since then has been rooted in that grace. It was my own “second conversion”.

I welcome the publication of “The Second Conversion of Dr. George Dallas” and I commend his Church of Ireland friend, Dr. Roddy Evans, for whom it was a labour of love to put together this Irish Presbyterian story of courage and grace.

Gerry Reynolds C.Ss.R.  
Clonard Monastery, June 12th 1999



## DR. GEORGE G DALLAS – LIFE

**I**N 1922 GEORGE DALLAS, second son of Alan and Florence Dallas, was born in Ballybay, Co Monaghan. They were both teachers in the local Presbyterian Church School. Southern Ireland at the time was in bloody civil war. This followed the signing of the Anglo Irish Treaty of 1921. County Monaghan was one of the three counties belonging to the ancient province of Ulster which was excluded from the new entity – Northern Ireland. It fell under the jurisdiction of the Free State Government in Dublin.

When teaching Irish became compulsory in all Free State schools, Mr. Dallas said, “It is hard enough to teach the English language without having to teach the Irish language as well”. The family moved to Dromara in Co. Down where Mr. Dallas was a teacher in the Church School and Mrs. Dallas in a school in the town. George and his older brother, Herbert, received their early educational grounding in their mother’s school. An Aunt, Maggie Dallas, came to live with them. She helped with the running of the household. Later Maggie married a local farmer, a Mr. William Wright Skelly.

After twelve years in Dromara finding a high school for the boys became the concern of both teacher parents. Mr. Dallas spotted an opening for teachers in a church school in Dervock, North Antrim, a short rail journey from Ballycastle High School.

Dervock in those days boasted a famous citizen, the covenanting Rev. Robert McIlmoyle. George would see him coming down the street not only to pastor his human flock but also his prize Border Leicester sheep which won rosettes at many an agricultural show.

Rev. McIlmoyle was a founder member of the Ulster Farmers Union and, as a renowned raconteur, his speech was a fixture at every U.F.U. meeting.

George was a clever boy – always obtaining top marks in his school exams. But in 1938 he contracted tuberculosis and the next three years were spent as a patient in the Forster Green Hospital, Belfast.

In those days there were no effective antibiotics for the tubercle bacillus. Treatment consisted of strict bed rest. When the disease affected the lungs it usually destroyed lung tissue creating one or more cavities. When this occurred air was passed through the chest wall, a therapy known as pneumothorax. This caused the lung to collapse, forcing the cavities to close and hopefully allowed healing to take place. In a few cases where adhesions prevented collapse of the lung a very severe and mutilating operation, known as thoracoplasty, was performed. A surgeon cut out a piece of each rib on the diseased side allowing the chest wall to collapse inwards and thus forcing the cavities to close. At the age of 16 years George underwent this drastic procedure. A degree of recovery ensued but for the rest of his life, George had the use of only one lung. Because of complications in the diseased lung, he required regular medical supervision and treatment until his death.

Another young man, Paddy O'Fee, also suffering from tuberculosis, shared the ward with George. Like George he went on to become a doctor. His brother, Tomás, would come to visit him. Many years later, George and this brother, now the Cardinal Primate of all Ireland, would meet.

About this time, George and his family came in contact with the Oxford Group. George, himself, joined the movement. The Oxford Group was founded in 1921 by a Lutheran pastor, Frank Buchman. Dr. Buchman, who described the Oxford Group as “a Christian revolution, whose concern is vital Christianity. Its aim is a new social order under the dictatorship of the Spirit of God, making for better human relationships, for unselfish co-operation, for cleaner business, cleaner politics, for the elimination of political, industrial and social antagonism”. Buchman believed that the Christian moral standards of the Sermon on the Mount, honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, were absolute. Absolute moral standards appealed to George both as a Christian and as a medical scientist.

George had ambitions to become a medical missionary, but his health precluded this possibility. He decided instead to devote his life to the treatment of tuberculosis. In 1941 he entered the Queen’s University Medical School, Belfast. His natural intellectual ability enabled him to do very well in his medical studies. In 1946 he and his brother, Herbert, who studied dentistry, graduated together.

George did a special study of tuberculosis. His thesis on the subject won him an M.D. with distinction. Today in the western world antibiotics specific for the disease, the use of B.C.G. vaccine, the pasteurisation of milk and the promotion of tuberculosis free herds of cattle, have all but eliminated this terrible scourge from our population. George lived to experience at first hand this transformation. In later life he benefited from antibiotics when he had a tubercular flare up in his diseased lung.

George was a very caring doctor and was always very thorough in the diagnosis and treatment of his patients. He held clinics specialising

in chest disorders in hospitals all over Northern Ireland. His erstwhile fellow patient, Dr. Paddy O'Fee, often sent patients to him in the Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry.

George had many interests. He enjoyed walking in the country. He was a keen birdwatcher. He loved gardening. He had a fascination with the English language and the precise meaning of words. He loved crossword puzzles but only the more difficult ones. He regarded it as cheating to resort to a dictionary or thesaurus. No weed survived long among George's roses. Every summer he cultivated wonderful beds of begonias and every autumn the tubers were taken in, separated and stored for the following year. Those tubers were 50 years old.

George's abiding love was his Presbyterian Community in Northern Ireland. He leaned towards the radical tradition. He admired the United Irishman, Dr. William Drennan, the renowned Glasgow teacher and philosopher, Rev. Francis Hutcheson, born in Armagh and influential on both sides of the Atlantic; and Francis Mackemie, Ramelton, Co. Donegal, father of the Presbyterian Church in North America. In later years he was much influenced by the life of Rev. J.B. Armour of Ballymoney and the writings of his son, W. S. Armour, editor of the newspaper, *The Northern Whig*.

George was by nature a perfectionist. While diffident and often unsure of himself he could be quite sharp, even with close friends when he considered that a statement they made was not entirely accurate. While often worried about his financial affairs he was extremely generous throughout his life. He gave away so much of his money that on occasion he would leave himself short for his own

needs. His gift of intuition gave him a keen discernment of the hidden attitudes of people and led him to hold in high regard those with whom he engaged in an honest dialogue.

In the early days of the Northern Ireland troubles, George supported Prime Minister Terence O'Neill in his attempts to bring in much needed reforms. With O'Neill's resignation George saw all his hopes of a better future collapse. His heart was with his people. He told a friend at that time, "The thought of a United Ireland fills me with panic." Harold Wilson's infamous remark that the people of Northern Ireland were "spongers" filled him with rage.

After the Sunningdale Agreement collapsed in 1974, George began to search for what he himself could do to improve community relationships. He had a keen ear for dialogue and could remember whole passages of conversation verbatim. He wrote a short play which could be performed as a reading by friends from both communities. Readings of this play took place in school halls and church centres in Belfast and Derry.

A Canadian doctor concerned about a developing conflict between English and French-speaking Canadians in Quebec became interested in what George was doing. He invited him and his friends to Canada and to present his play. George liked the idea of using what he had so far learned in Ireland to help someone else in another situation. He accepted the invitation and its challenge.

The party visited Montreal, Trois Rivières, Quebec City and finally New York and Washington. Two events from this journey were to change the course of George's life. In Montreal he was staying in the home of a Swiss psychiatrist, Professor Morf and his wife.

Also staying in the home was a Swiss guest, Ruth Mathys. George fell in love with the professor's guest and persuaded her to become his wife. They were married in Switzerland. Ruth came to make her home in turbulent Northern Ireland.

The second significant event from the Canadian visit was the beginning of a friendship with Laurent Gagnon, a young French Canadian who subsequently came to visit Belfast.

Soon after George's return to Belfast he and his new bride regularly invited four friends to come to their house for Sunday lunches. These four had known George for many years. All four came from the South of Ireland. They were members of the Church of Ireland and graduates of Trinity College, Dublin. George used these occasions to probe in his own honest and precise way the relationship between the Church of Ireland, the once established Church, and the Church of the Protestant Ascendancy, and his own Presbyterian Church, the Church of the Dissenters. His guests began to identify attitudes of superiority and arrogance towards the Presbyterians which they did not imagine that they possessed. They saw themselves as the most tolerant and moderate people in the world towards everyone else.

The conflict in Northern Ireland was now in its ninth year. The Role of the Church Committee of the Church of Ireland issued a statement part of which read, "Given penitence, honesty, and a determination to face radical change, there is still time for churches, governments and others to make a positive contribution to the creation of a society for which we all long."

George's four friends drafted a reply. They recorded the history of the Church of Ireland and apologised for wrongs perpetrated against their Catholic fellow countrymen. But they also stated, "The Protestant Ascendancy that ruled in the Dublin Parliament was the Ascendancy of the Church of Ireland. So the penal laws were to some extent applied to Presbyterians also. They, like Catholics, could not hold office under the Crown. They, like Catholics, were forced to pay tithes to help finance the Church of Ireland. For these and other reasons Presbyterians migrated in tens of thousands to the United States. In the War of Independence they helped to form the backbone of Washington's Army."

The four, who made this statement, consulted with Dr. G. O. Simms, Primate of the Church of Ireland. Mrs. Mercy Simms, his wife, suggested that they publish it on the opening day of the Church's General Synod. She said, "This statement should have been made years ago and it should have been done officially."

The publication of this statement was a very important moment for George. It assuaged a deep wound in his spirit.

The young French Canadian, Laurent Gagnon, came to Belfast in order to see the situation there for himself. Friends of George, Billy and Ivy Arnold, offered to have the young man in their home. Billy worked in the shipyards where he was a trade union secretary. He was also a member of the Orange Order. Billy decided that the only thing he could do with a French Canadian Catholic was to take him to the local Catholic priests. They visited a number of priests and finally came to Clonard Monastery, Falls Road, where they met Fr. Christopher McCarthy.

Laurent Gagnon invited Fr. McCarthy to meet George and Ruth and some of their friends. One of these was an old lady whose father, Sir Fredrick Simmons, had been the wartime Mayor of the City of Derry. King George VI had knighted him for his civic services to the city. However, as Mayor of Derry, he was also responsible for the worst gerrymandering in Northern Ireland. During the evening the old lady apologised to Fr. McCarthy for what she and her family had done to the city's nationalist population. Fr. McCarthy was deeply touched by her apology and as a result made an extraordinary decision to invite George and Ruth and their friends to the Bible Study Classes which he was leading in Clonard Monastery. And so on 17th November 1977, they joined the Bible Study Class which they attended each Thursday evening for many years.

Fr. McCarthy had begun these classes some time earlier at the request of a technician in an engineering unit in which he was the only Catholic. Many of his fellow Protestant technicians constantly taunted him. They used quotations from the Bible to humiliate him. He asked Fr. McCarthy to arrange regular Bible study classes. He wanted to be able to defend himself against those who opposed him.

When George and Ruth and their friends came to the classes they opened up a new world for them. With the help of the Bible they began to explore the relationship between the Protestant and Catholic communities.

Commenting on what he experienced, George wrote, "For some of us it has helped greatly to meet in a Bible Study Group with Catholics from the 'grass roots'. All are people who have suffered



from discrimination and harassment caused by the unjust society we have created and instead of being bitter as we expect (and almost demand) we found in them qualities of generosity, graciousness and forgiveness which we knew, in spite of all our supposed advantages as Protestants, we did not have.”

A conversation with a Catholic friend from Clonard Bible Study group remained with George to the end of his life. It caused him to break down and weep bitter tears. Writing about it he says, “For me the most devastating experience was when one of our new friends told me how his life was made hell every day at work by a bully-boy who also intimidates other Protestant fellow workers. Ironically our friend was not seeking sympathy or even understanding but was deploring his own lack of Christian forgiveness for his persecutor. A dozen such bully-boys can terrorise a large factory, and make it impossible for Catholics to work there. I realised as never before the injustice of our dominance which at all levels depends ultimately on the threat of sectarian murder. About the same time, having begun to understand more about what we needed to repent for, and a little about repentance itself, I began to think of what repentance must mean for our community in relation to Ireland. Surely it must mean a humble and glad acceptance of ourselves fully as Irish people, as we were always meant to be, not Irish and British as well, or any other formula that allows us to go on feeling superior. Unless our community finds this kind of repentance and learns to care for all the people of Ireland, there will always be violence in this country.”

George was one of those people who found it difficult to express what he felt about his community and country. The only way he could manage it was by sitting down with paper and pen and

committing to writing his deep convictions. In the final years of his life he would probe and examine again and again, and as honestly as he was able, the feelings and the instincts that came from the depths of his being. He searched for insights that would reveal the truths about his community which he believed would provide the soundest foundations for the future.

Out of this reflection came a series of articles which were published in many journals. One of the first was “The Furrow” of September 1982. The article was entitled, “Is Irish Unity Possible?”. He wrote, “Irish unity will be possible when we learn to love and respect each other, and, which may be more difficult, understand each other. Protestants need to understand the thought processes of those we have wronged. In a situation of continuing injustice peace will remain impossible unless we change our attitudes and behaviour. And we need to be willing to learn from those we thought could never teach us anything. Catholics can help us to find the new thinking we need, but as well as political moderates and ecumenical Christians talking to each other, there must be more dialogue between people of more typical political and religious views on both sides. Protestants may be helped to find their place in the Irish nation by those Catholics in whom the flame of Irish Nationhood burns brightest, and they are not necessarily the moderates.”

Shortly afterwards he was asked to make a submission to the New Ireland Forum. Having received George’s submission the Forum asked him to appear in person in Dublin Castle to be questioned on what he wrote. What follows is the dialogue which took place between Dr. Rory O’Hanlon, Fianna Fail T. D., and George:

*Deputy O'Hanlon:* I welcome you to the Forum and I would like to congratulate you on one of the best and most thoughtful submissions to come before the Forum from Northern Ireland. You support a unitary state and are against a federal solution. You also say that a weakening of sovereignty leaves a clear field for extremists. I fully agree with you on this. Would you like to elaborate on it?

*Dr. Dallas:* Almost any solution that has been mentioned or talked about is unworkable because of entrenched attitudes, but I feel if there was any possibility of a change in attitudes we might be at the point where something could begin to happen. The idea of a unitary state, in my mind, is based on the fact that Protestants in the eighteenth century all regarded themselves as Irish and I think that is what we were all meant to be.

We have been, as a community, brainwashed over some generations into accepting a position which is not really our true one and in keeping with the best of our past traditions. I also feel that the security of the Protestant Community in Ireland will be found in an all-Ireland context, as much as anything, from the point of view of morality, which is threatened more in the British context than it would be in an all-Ireland context.

*Dr. O'Hanlon:* Do you believe that liberalisation of the laws on divorce, contraception and abortion would make an united Ireland more attractive to Protestants?

*Dr. Dallas:* No, I do not. It would have absolutely no effect on the average unionist and does not make him any more likely to give up his present position.

*Dr. O'Hanlon:* How would you describe the feelings of the Unionist people regarding their behaviour towards the Nationalists over the last 60 years?

*Dr. Dallas:* I think unionists feel perfectly justified in their behaviour and attitudes, but against that I would say that deep down in people's hearts, subconsciously, there is something of guilt because of what happened centuries ago when land was seized from Catholics. People are not unaware of that, or more recently of the whole matter of employment and the privileged position of Protestants or Unionists in that respect.

*Dr. O'Hanlon:* You state in your submission that the Presbyterian historical experience is such that this community remains the key to the situation in the North. What role do you see your Church playing on the road towards a new Ireland?

*Dr. Dallas:* There are some Presbyterian ministers representing different viewpoints within the Church who are taking a courageous stand on the question of loyalism, a kind of total identification of Protestantism with the unionist political position which I feel is the basic evil of the situation. Some men on both the ecumenical wing of the Church and a section of the evangelical wing of the Church have been calling for a dissociation. If that spirit can grow, I feel that they have a chance to get to the great mass of the people, say, the country people, the farmers who are very fine people as regards integrity, but are completely blind and brainwashed on the question of the Irish Nation.

I heard one of these ministers say some months ago in a discussion with an Anglican bishop that if we find our total security in Christ we have no need to look for it anywhere else and that this would leave the way completely open to consideration of any reasonable options, in that people would be free from the things from the past that bind their hearts and minds.

*Dr. O'Hanlon:* Do you believe that the British Government has made an unjustified attempt to wash their hands of their responsibility for the Northern situation?

*Dr. Dallas:* Yes, I do. I feel that Britain historically is to blame for much that is wrong in Northern Ireland, having created the situation in the first place by planting a large number of Protestant settlers there, and also that she is at present responsible for the situation. I feel that Britain needs to take an honest look at what she has done, both in the past and present. At this stage there is more to be gained from discussions between the Irish and British nations at government level than from talks between North and South.

George's writings brought him in touch with many new people. One was John Austin Baker, Bishop of Salisbury, and his wife, Jill. In 1979 when he was a Canon of the Westminster Abbey, and Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons, Bishop Baker preached in the Abbey that Britain should admit her sins towards Ireland. A short time later he met George and subsequently paid many visits to Ireland, staying as a guest of George and Ruth in Belfast.

Writing to Ruth on George's death, the Bishop said, "George was a great soul, a great human being, with a penetrating and hugely sympathetic mind and heart that saw deep into truth but also took in the need and worth of men and women of every sort. He helped us all to see our own situation in a new light, and challenged us to find the courage to acknowledge our common humanity. To have known him and to have read his writings was a very special privilege for which we thank God."

Another person who came to know George was Dr. Martin Mansergh, historian and academic, who has been a special advisor on Northern Ireland to three Irish Prime Ministers. Writing in "The Irish Press" on 31st July 1984, Dr. Mansergh stated, "George Dallas, a Belfast Presbyterian consultant, has in a number of public contributions undertaken extremely courageous and forthright criticism of negative aspects of Irish Protestantism. In some ways Dallas is the most radical Protestant voice in Northern Ireland today. In his presentation to the Forum he stated, 'It is futile to talk about reconciliation, at least without considering the price that needs to be paid for it, which in the case of Protestants is giving up supremacy. Otherwise, for Protestants, reconciliation means betrayal and for Catholics, it means giving in to Protestant supremacy. As far as Protestants are concerned nothing will work except a free, glad and willing acceptance of their Irishness.' "

When the Clonard Bible Study Group was invited on February 18th 1978 to visit Cardinal Tomás O'Fiaich in Armagh, the Cardinal immediately recognised George as the patient in the same ward as his brother, Patrick, many years previously. A unique friendship developed between the Cardinal and the Presbyterian doctor. The Cardinal visited George and Ruth in their home.

When Cardinal John O'Connor of New York visited Ireland with a group of American Catholic bishops, Cardinal O'Fiaich invited George to meet them over dinner.

Another of George's friends was an English lady who had been a senior civil servant and had lived in Northern Ireland for many years. Like many English people she acknowledged the wrongs done by England to Ireland and the Irish people over the centuries. However she found it difficult to understand or sympathise with the Protestant community. In a letter to her in April 1995, he expressed a concern, "It is that there is something deeply felt, a longing that some English person or persons should take on to help our community to find its true relationship with Catholic Ireland. It is essential for England to be involved in such a search since England created the divisions between us in the first place. For us beginning to find the right relationship with Catholic Ireland would involve beginning to create an Ireland for all the people of Ireland, thus taking up again the work of the United Irishmen. This is something we have not even begun to see in the Peace Process. It would also help the entire Protestant community to find its true position and destiny as part of the historic Irish Nation, and would help Catholic Ireland to achieve balance and cease to be a monolithic block, analogous to the unionist one, with all the wrong use of power that involves."

The most remarkable friendship which developed in his life was with Tom Hartley a Sinn Fein member of the Belfast City Council. When they first met in 1984 George instinctively liked and trusted Tom. That trust remained to the end of his life. George was able to talk with Tom about how he felt for his Presbyterian community. Based on a long evening's discussion in Tom's home George wrote

an article entitled, “Irish Protestants and Irish Nationalism” for the November 1988 edition of “IRIS” the Republican magazine. In that article George says, “The traditional republican view that following British withdrawal the Protestants would willingly accept to become Irish is unrealistic, given the contempt for all things Catholic and Gaelic that has been bred into us”.

At the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis in February 1995, Tom Hartley moved a motion which began, “Friends, I wish to speak on motion 26. This motion is in my view one of the most crucial motions of this Ard Fheis. This motion contains not just the view that dialogue between us and the Northern Protestant community is crucial in today’s political context but also contains the dynamic for our party to update its attitudes as a result of our ongoing discussions with Northern Protestants.”

In a letter to Tom shortly afterwards, George wrote, “I was shown a copy of your speech in support of motion 26 at the Ard Fheis. It contains for a Protestant, some rather astonishing and very necessary new thought, which needs to be matched in some way from our side. Paragraphs 2 and 3 are for me the heart of the matter, particularly the approach visualised from the Republican movement that can enable us to cease to be a non-people, and make it possible to be, as you say, a crucial component in the search for a just and lasting settlement.

“I am grateful that you refer to our community as the Northern Protestant community and not the unionist community, which would exclude people like myself who have ceased to be unionist as well as others who have never been unionist.”



The power of ideology was an issue on which George began to focus as a result of his conversation with Tom Hartley. George later wrote, “In trying to understand what ideology is, I have been helped by Sean Cronin’s book, ‘Irish Nationalism – a history of its roots and ideology’, and have come to appreciate it as a force in history which by looking at all the realities of a situation can bring about a desired objective, sometimes against seemingly impossible odds, and in a struggle lasting possibly for several generations.

“One great aim of our age is to achieve a fusion between this force and that other great force in history, the Holy Spirit. Christianity needs ideology to enable it to speak to the world in a way that is fully relevant to today’s realities and needs, while ideology needs Christianity to complete it.”

Many people on both sides of the Irish Sea considered that the principal cause of the troubles in Northern Ireland was the stiff-necked intransigence of George’s own community. They viewed the conflict as a quarrel between two tribes who had failed to advance into the 20th Century. George was greatly hurt by this attitude especially when held by close friends. To him it was blatantly clear that the conflict was a clash between two nations, both mother countries, one Irish and the other English.

Commenting in an article on the 19th Century Liberal Party’s attempts at Home Rule he wrote of the then Prime Minister, “Gladstone was not yet aware that the basic issue was a confrontation of nationalities which reform alone would never answer, and perhaps in his heart he was more concerned with the conscience of England than about righting the wrongs of Ireland.

But would that there were more men in British politics today who saw even as far as he did, that nations and groups as well as individuals must repent of injustices and make restitution for them. A Christian Nation, if there is such a thing, must have the Cross at the heart of its national policy.”

About his own community he writes, “I feel that we need all the help we can get in this. Two groups who may help are (1) humble repentant English, and (2) caring, honest Irish Catholics.” And then he goes on, “All this is impossible humanly but possible with God. It can happen. And are we meant to think then where it may lead? The British-Irish relationship and the secondary Irish Protestant-Catholic relationship are multiplied many times over the world, and even the beginning of an answer in our situation can have immediate application in dozens of other places. This means we are getting into the realm of the destiny of nations. Ireland has a destiny but could it be that Irish Catholics and Protestants together are meant to be less concerned with their own country than with the destiny of England, in a programme which must end in the establishment of the kingdom of God in the whole world?

“I tend to have hate in my heart for England, thinking of what she has done to my people, as I see it, but if I am more concerned about her destiny than with my own people, that hatred is assuaged. There are many possibilities. India and Pakistan, divided for much the same reasons as Ireland, and all the other countries which England has ruled primarily for her own benefit, may be regarded as opportunities for a humble repentant England to reach a new destiny of greatness. I think of South Africa, where the hurts of the Boer War have never been healed. There is a place there for such repentant English, but also the resemblances between the Ulster Protestant

community and the Afrikaners suggest a place for us as well. Could it be that the combination of an extreme degree of self-righteousness and a sense of being ‘special’ along with a sense of being badly treated in the past or present is the root of intransigence?”

The appendix to this booklet contains articles written by George in various journals. They give a fuller insight into the concerns and hopes that grew in George for his Presbyterian community and were in truth the fruits of his “second conversion”.

## SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR POLITICAL CHANGE

*Submission to the New Ireland Forum, 1983*

### **Introduction:**

To many people it is almost impossible because of entrenched attitudes to see any way forward politically and this raises the question whether political advance requires some kind of spiritual foundation based on our common Christianity. Catholics and Protestants in Ireland have a common inheritance in such concepts as sin, repentance, forgiveness and redemption. While some theologians have been writing about the politics of forgiveness, others like the Bishop of Salisbury have stressed in addition the importance of repentance at the level of the community or nation. In conflicts world-wide of which that in Northern Ireland is an example, the two sides are rarely equal and opposite, and this emphasis on repentance is necessary, especially in the case of the more privileged element which has usually caused most of the suffering. It may help to define repentance in non-theological terms as simply taking an honest look at what our community or nation has done wrong.

### **Repentance: Northern Protestants**

The entire Northern Protestant community is ridden by guilt, which is mostly unconscious but leaves its mark on people's characters. Attitudes of superiority and contempt have persisted for several centuries, along with unjust practices in various forms, which seem to matter less when they affect people whom one despises. Repentance for hatred and contempt would mean their replacement by love and respect for our Catholic neighbours, and would have the secondary effect that Protestants could begin to feel really Irish,

making a united country possible. Ireland, North and South, needs a strong Protestant community totally loyal to Ireland, not least politically, in view of the growing tendency in the South for politics to resolve into church and anti-church factions, as in some European Catholic countries.

### **In-built Injustice**

Injustice is built into the Unionist system. Already in 1920 the difference in birth rates was sufficiently marked to make it essential for the survival of the Northern State. Employment practices in industry at all levels, including decisions of the siting of industry, was the aspect which did most to ensure that the emigration rate of Catholics remained much higher than that of Protestants. Fair employment policies have helped only marginally. Recent legislation has greatly improved opportunities for the Catholic middle class, to the extent that some of them now feel a stake in the present set-up. This has driven a wedge between them and the Catholic working class who feel abandoned. Unemployment rates of 70% and more in some areas make continuing recruitment for extremist organisations inevitable.

The liberal Unionism of O'Neill was doomed to failure, because Unionism for most of its supporters means loyalism or political Protestantism, which is incapable of change. This is not to say that Unionism is not a valid political position for anyone, Protestant or Catholic, but what is wrong is the total identification of Unionism and Protestantism. The ending of loyalism and the establishment for Protestants of the right of private judgement politically, are matters of high priority. It is impossible for Unionism as at present constituted to take part in dialogue with nationally minded parties. It is seen as treachery and would be political suicide. Protestants can only take part in talks if they cease to be loyalists.

Political Protestantism involves the retention of power in Protestant hands over all aspects of life, and is a continuing source of fear to Catholics in many areas as the ultimate sanction for it is the threat of sectarian murder. Britain is involved also, as loyalist power rests on the blackmail of the bloodbath. (One might mention briefly the opposite phenomenon of political Catholicism, where the total identification of Irish national feeling and Catholic faith could be seen as an obstacle to Protestants beginning to think of themselves as Irish. However, this trend must be seen always as a reaction to political Protestantism, and might disappear or be modified if the latter could die a natural death).

### **Repentance: Britain**

An even more important priority than the repentance of Northern Protestants is that of the English or British nation, again defining repentance as taking an honest look at what they have done. Unionists are unlikely to change their attitudes while the present relationship of dependence and blackmail is allowed to persist. In addition at certain key periods in history the British establishment has strengthened its position in Ireland by appealing to political Protestantism. Therefore the English input is paramount. They are ultimately responsible for the situation as the sovereign power. It must also be remembered that they created the situation in the first place by planting a Protestant garrison in the North, encouraging it over the centuries to continue as a garrison bringing law and order to the barbarous natives, and punishing it severely if it showed signs of stepping out of line or making common cause with the Catholics. To use another group of people in this way is one of the greatest wrongs any nation can do. W.S. Armour writing in the 1930's put it very clearly. The terrible treatment of the Catholics was equivalent to killing the body, but the treatment of the Protestant garrison by the

British and the local ascendancy as their agents amounted to killing the soul. Repentance with the putting right of wrongs was the only hope, and the Act of Union had made that impossible. In the last century Matthew Arnold saw no remedy to the Irish problem “except the very radical remedy of changing the character of the English people”.

### **Answer to Violence**

The Northern Protestant community and the British nation both need what has been called a creative minority, enough thinking people who will take an honest look and act on what they see. This kind of minority can act like leaven. Any answer to violence requires a change of attitude in the Protestants and in Britain. The unjust society which both continue to tolerate, with no prospect of alleviation as far as the most deprived section of the Catholic population are concerned, allows the latter no alternative but to support groups committed to violence. Some men are involved in evil who would not otherwise be evil, so that the greater evil is that of those who allow the injustice to continue. Alongside this the British approach has been to deal first with violence, instead of looking first at what is wrong.

### **Identity Crisis**

While increasing polarisation in the North tends to strengthen the sense of Britishness among the Protestants there is an opposing tendency towards uncertainty. The crisis of identity among Protestants seems likely to intensify and to involve more and more of them as time goes on. In eighteenth century Ireland there were first-class and second-class Protestants, but almost all looked at themselves as Irish, in fact the only Irish who mattered. The appeal to self-interest at the time of the Act of Union and afterwards rapidly produced the feeling of being British, reinforced in the Victorian era

by the growing power and prestige of the British Empire. Loyalty was then consolidated in the North by a powerful emotional tie-up involving the British Empire, the Royal Family, and a poorly understood evangelical Protestantism. The demise of the Empire has begun to erode the foundations of the Northern Protestants' Britishness and this is aided by disillusionment about the relationship with Britain.

To those beginning to question it is a choice between an Ulster and an Irish identity. Considerable thought has emanated from the UDA, and at least they face the fact that it is no longer possible to be British. This thinking is interesting but inadequate. The fact that an ancient Celtic people, the Cruithni, form a large part of the ancestry of Ulster Protestants and Catholics alike becomes one of the arguments for an independent Northern Ireland. This ignores the large elements of Gaelic ancestry of the Northern Protestants and in Catholics in the whole of Ireland, and when both the Gaels and the Cruithni are taken into account it becomes an argument for the unity and independence of the whole island, especially when one considers the economic non-viability of such a small area as Northern Ireland. From the beginning Irish Protestants of all denominations have been concerned with survival, and especially since 1800 have looked to Britain for their security. For those who are still concerned with their community's survival, but a survival with honour rather than merely dominance, the answer is to be found in an Irish context. To seek for it in an independent Ulster would be extremely precarious.



## **Lack of Understanding in the South**

The people of the North, both Catholic and Protestant, feel that they are misunderstood by the whole mass of people in the South, both Catholic and Protestant. Contributing to this misunderstanding are differences in the racial mixture, in temperament, and perhaps most important, in the historical experience of the two parts of the island.

1. Presbyterians: To deal first with the Northern Protestants, it is important to consider the historical experience of the Presbyterians, who in the eighteenth century formed two-thirds of the total Protestant population in the North, and are still the largest denomination. That experience colours the thinking of most of those of other denominations, including the Church of Ireland. A relatively small number may see themselves as Anglo-Irish like the great majority of Southern Protestants. The American term “Scotch-Irish” is absolutely correct as a description of the emotional attachment of most. (This is another factor tending to perpetuate the sense of Britishness, and perhaps if the Scots could ever dare to be more Scottish it would help Irish Protestants to be more Irish).

Presbyterians especially have grown up with a sense of themselves as a persecuted people, going back to the discriminatory laws of the eighteenth century, the harsh treatment of tenant farmers by landlords, and even the seventeenth century persecution of the Covenanters in Scotland. History being little known or understood, it is not generally realised that most of the ill-treatment of the past was done by fellow Protestants, so that when kicked by the fellow above us we often do not kick back but kick the fellow below us. The self-righteousness often associated with Calvinism reinforces the sense that we are a rather

special people. The combination of feeling we are a chosen people with the knowledge of having been badly treated in the past is a recipe for intransigence, with parallels in South Africa and the Middle East.

In the past anti-Catholic and anti-establishment feelings among Presbyterians and other Protestants have opposed each other, but recently it has been possible to unite both tendencies to form a very powerful and dangerous force - although within the ranks of this force independent thought is not lacking. The Presbyterian historical experience is such that this community remains the key to the situation in the North, with the possibility of bringing either healing or disaster. Elements in the Presbyterian Church were the conscience of Irish Protestantism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today hopeful new thinking is coming from a courageous minority of ministers on both the ecumenical and evangelical wings, especially along the lines of dissociating the Church's teaching from Loyalism, the idolatry of this misguided association and, reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets, the need for repentance for this idolatry. The majority however are being manoeuvred into more and more extreme positions, as has happened politically with Unionism.

2. Catholics: Coming to the Northern Catholics, it has to be said that much more attention needs to be given to their fears than to those of the Protestants. The fears of the Protestants of entering some form of United Ireland really boil down to the fear of losing power, or as much of the power as is not wielded by Britain. The Northern Catholic community lives with frustration and a sense of abandonment, particularly in ghetto

areas. It has never really been considered or consulted by either London or Dublin since the time of the first Home Rule Bill and certainly not during the period 1916-1922.

A typical Catholic from West Belfast made the following points:-

- a) The lack of consideration of Northern Catholics has continued until 1983.
- b) According to British propaganda they are responsible for the trouble and this is swallowed in the South, including at Government level.
- c) In a United Ireland Protestants will be wooed, and guaranteed all they ask, but Catholics will be treated worst, will suffer even more than they do now, and will remain 'a bird-cage floor' people.
- d) Bearing in mind the Civil War, the Government will deal ruthlessly with continuing violence, and the whole Northern Catholic community will suffer.
- e) Spokesmen are needed who will insist on adequate safeguards for both communities.
- f) Southern Catholics, regardless of class or status, are intolerant of Northern Catholics and blame them for the trouble
- g) A solution is required where all are treated with justice and equality, and justice is seen to be done to all.

In spite of reservations like these the great majority of Northern Catholics remain convinced of the necessity for a United Ireland.

## **Christian Moral Standards**

Protestants are often manoeuvred into a position where they think they have to oppose automatically whatever Catholics hold, very much so in the case of moral standards, especially the abortion issue. The vote on the amendment at the last Presbyterian General Assembly showed over a third prepared to line up with the Catholics on this issue, a far from negligible figure. Some Protestant Churchmen have appeared to be in favour of the British or Western European type of permissive society, when this is very far from what they really think. In reality most Protestants have a respect for the traditional standards common to all Christians in the last century and would differ from Catholics only on details, so that what could be a point of unity is falsely made into one of division.

There is a massive propaganda campaign in the South which suggests that altering the laws on divorce, contraception and abortion would make a United Ireland more attractive to Protestants. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many Northern Protestants feel insulted that they are used by so-called liberal elements to promote a permissive society in the south. These “liberals” seem to have in mind a united country made up of ex-Protestants and ex-Catholics. True Protestantism respects Christian morality, and will be safer in a united country where this respect is held by the vast majority of the citizens.

Another aspect of the question is that Ireland as a whole has a less well-developed civic sense than, say Britain, where people may continue to respect law and order after ceasing to be Christian. Here there are no reasons other than Christian ones for living morally, hence the continuing vitally important place of all the Churches in the nation's life.

## Sovereignty

Under the present constitutional arrangements it is futile to talk about reconciliation, at least without considering the price which needs to be paid for it, which in the case of the Protestants, is giving up supremacy. Otherwise for Protestants reconciliation means betrayal and for Catholics it means giving into Protestant supremacy. This leads directly to the basic issue, which is whether Britain or Ireland have sovereignty over Northern Ireland, and that is an issue between the British and Irish nations. Any apparent weakening by the constitutional parties on sovereignty in order to accommodate the Northern Protestants leaves a clear field for the extremist groups. As far as the Protestants are concerned nothing will work except a full, glad and willing acceptance of their Irishness. Southern Protestants accepted Irish nationality reluctantly, having no alternative, but a reluctant acceptance by Northern Protestants would in view of their numbers sow the seeds of massive discord for the future. The best solution is a unitary state, and there is no place or need for a federal solution.

Talks between North and South would mean that many of the Northern participants would be accused of treachery, and would therefore be fruitless. The real need at this stage is for honest talk between the representatives of the Irish and British nations. Whatever Government is in power in Dublin has the obligation to insist that Britain takes an honest look at its past history and present responsibility in relation to Ireland. Unless it does it will be next to impossible for the political leaders of Northern Ireland to do so.

George Gordon Dallas (Northern Presbyterian)

## IRISH PROTESTANTS AND IRISH NATIONALISM

*An open letter to the Republican newspaper, IRIS,  
on Irish identity and the ethos of Irish nationalism.*

Towards the end of the last year three of us, a Northern Catholic, a Southern Anglican and a Northern Protestant talked with a member of Sinn Fein.

Three points particularly impressed us: his emphasis on the basis of the Northern Ireland problem being in the relationship between the British and Irish nations; and his emphasis on ideology; and the fact that he personally did not hate England. He went on to say something like this, that we would tackle the problem with the Holy Spirit and they would do it with ideology.

In trying to understand better what ideology is, I have been helped by Sean Cronin's book, "Irish Nationalism - A History of its Roots and Ideology", and have come to appreciate it as a force in history which by looking at all the realities of a situation can bring about a desired objective, sometimes against seemingly impossible odds, and in a struggle lasting probably for several generations can retain the initiative.

One great need of our age is to achieve a fusion between this force and that other great force in history, the Holy Spirit. Christianity needs ideology to enable it to speak to the world in a way that is fully relevant to today's realities and needs, while ideology needs Christianity to complete it. Otherwise it remains restrictive (a word used about it by Cronin) divisive and in Marx's phrase "false consciousness". It is incomplete in that it fails to take account of all

the realities, like God and the possibility of radical change in human motivation through the Holy Spirit. By failing to take account of spiritual realities it presents a distortion of reality.

All ideology has to do with struggle but I would not agree with Marx that it is necessarily always class struggle. The most fundamental struggle of all is that between good and evil. All injustice is due to evil but everything is not always clear-cut. Many struggles are between individuals and groups whose interests differ but who in their natures are mixtures of good and evil. What I am searching for at the deepest level is an ideology that unites us, without it, it will be impossible to bring about the integration of my own people in the Irish nation.

For myself, the heart of ideology is to love England enough to speak the truth to England, to the nation and people I find most difficult. I have been inhibited from this by the deep seated hatred of England I share with all my community. Once our eyes are opened we know this is the deepest thing in us, deeper than hatred of Catholics, and it is because of the way we have been used as a garrison in the interests of England. The resentment more and more of us now feel is at least partly due to the half-conscious recognition of this. The heart of ideology for England is the relationship with Ireland, especially the 'unfinished business' of that relationship. I assume that for the Republican Movement that means principally the evils resulting from partition, the unjust society we maintain at England's behest because of our brainwashed and blinkered view of where our real interests lie.

Our group has come to believe that there is another large area of 'unfinished business' which has scarcely been looked at by anyone,

the relationship between England and the Protestant section of the Irish nation, and which if it were looked at and tackled by England might go a long way towards dealing with the unjust society. (It is only in accepting our place in a complete Irish nation that there can be any future for us; we are alienated from Britain which regards us as not British, and from the incomplete state in the South which in general now insists we are British and, therefore, nothing to do with them). The Republican movement has not given this aspect of the relationship the attention it requires and, therefore, like us it is affected by 'false consciousness'.

Protestants have been put in the front line by the 'Ulsterisation of the conflict', as cynical a piece of 'divide and rule' policy as any in history and one which makes it abundantly clear that Northern Ireland is a colonial territory. But we Protestants must face the element of mutual exploitation in this relationship. They use us but we blackmail them. Each has it in their power to liberate the other. We could be liberated to find our rightful place in Ireland. England could be liberated to take on a world destiny of creative leadership based on restoring for the sins of its imperialist past.

The traditional republican view that following British withdrawal the Protestants would willingly accept to become Irish is unrealistic, given the contempt for all things Catholic and Gaelic that has been bred into us as well as the increasing polarisation. But an honest look at the relationship by official Britain, accompanied by a revocation of the guarantee and a commitment to withdrawal, might help to set in motion the liberation of the garrison of which W.S. Armour wrote in the 1930's.



One other thing our friend said was very significant, which was that he could not understand what my difficulty was in being Irish. For my part, I could not understand him not understanding me.

For our community, some of them now recognise our bogus British identity as a thing of the past; the great obstacle to considering the positive alternative of an Irish identity and nationality is that the Irish nation is perceived as a Catholic one, not only by Protestants but by Catholics also. The gut feeling of the average Catholic is that his nation is Catholic and if theoretically, he believes something else, this is what comes out at unguarded moments. The Irish nation was alive and well with Owen Roe O'Neill and Sarsfield, long before Wolfe Tone. I imagine the Presbyterian defection after things went wrong in 1798 was at least due to the realisation that Catholic Ireland had awakened and that there would eventually be an independent Ireland, but not the one they had fought for.

All the later developments of Irish nationalism took place without us and we can feel no emotional involvement with it. There was some minority participation by the Anglo-Irish community but very minimal participation indeed by the Scots-Irish community; so that it is not surprising that a nation has developed with an ethos very different from that of the nation Wolfe Tone had in mind, had all three population groups participated fully. What strikes many Northern Protestants still, including unionists, about the United Irishmen is how Protestant they were, people like us with their feet firmly on the ground. The romanticism of Young Ireland, the pagan mythology of Yeats and the mysticism of Pearse are all alien to us. We need, in humility, to try to understand and respect these things but we should not necessarily have to take them on board.

Personally, I want to be Irish as I am, but feel that Catholics do not allow me to. They expect us to move a bit of the way towards being “Catholic”, or at least something different from what we are. Until recently, I saw the obstacle as the perceived Catholic nation but it is not Catholic belief or even the power of the bishops that is the obstacle so much as what I would call the Catholic community, which identifies its total ethos as the criterion of Irishness. Until this begins to be understood in the Catholic community, we will not get anywhere. (There are some interesting comments related to this in a piece by Jennifer Johnston in the January issue of the Belfast review Fortnight. Also, I find myself in large agreement with various comments on identity by Dr. Christopher McGimpsey, the unionist politician).

Then I have to say that I see the Republican Movement of today as a Catholic movement, with negligible Protestant input, and consisting of people, practising Catholics or not, who are governed by the total ethos of a community which considers us less than fully Irish. Its ideology has failed in that, at least since the 1860s it has concentrated on the needs of the Catholic community and ignored the Northern Protestants, a community in Tone’s view just as Irish and which has suffered perhaps as much, though in a different way, from the misrule of England. (W. S. Armour repeatedly likened the terrible treatment of Catholic Ireland to killing the body, as in the Biblical metaphor, while preserving their souls intact, but implied that what was done to the Protestants was killing the soul). These views have been strengthened by reading Cronin’s book, as at so many points the Catholic traditionalist strand in Irish nationalism and republicanism reasserts itself.

All of us in Ireland must get back to Tone in accepting that there still really are three communities in Ireland, not just two, “Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter” has a fine archaic ring in the speech of present day republicans when the next sentence may refer to Catholic and Protestant. Tone’s three categories of Irishmen now correspond to Gaelic-Irish, Anglo-Irish and Scots-Irish, the latter two groups being Irish people who feel some affinity to either Scotland or England - in the case of the Scots-Irish the affinity seems to be unrelated to origin of religious denomination and class may be the principle determinant. I often feel we are looked on as “non-people” by most people in the South and certainly we are looked on with contempt by the intellectual-atheistic element. But then many Northern Catholics also feel they are “non-people” in the South. Perhaps potentially we are the best allies each other could have in approaching both England and the South.

In conclusion, we are a community which has never had a first-class identity of any kind. In the late eighteenth century, we saw ourselves as Irish but it was a second-class identity. Later, in spite of hating England so much, we accepted a British identity and as the Empire grew in prestige felt we had something to be proud of, not realising then that it was bogus. Now, from time to time, Southern politicians assure us we can exchange a second-class British for a first-class Irish identity but we can only see a choice between two second-class identities. Nevertheless, it may not be too far away, maybe just around the corner, waiting for the time when we all understand each other better, subject of course to our sorting out our relationship with England.

## ATONEMENT BETWEEN NATIONS

“Ireland, Ireland! That cloud in the west, that coming storm, the minister of God’s retribution upon cruel and inveterate and but half-atoned injustice”. Writing to his wife at the beginning of his political career, Gladstone had some foreknowledge of where that career would lead. Professor Nicholas Mansergh (in “The Irish question 1840-1921”, p.139) discussing his later conversion with his party to the idea of Home Rule for Ireland, considered this choice of words to be not fortuitous. “Gladstone believed that in the end there was retribution for unredressed injustice; that such retribution was visited as surely upon nations as upon mortal men; that atonement was required as much of one as of the other and that in respect of English injustice to Ireland full atonement had yet to be made”. He took up his mission to pacify Ireland in the name of “the God of truth and justice”. And he was not alone in his views which were shared by the veteran radical John Bright and by others of his contemporaries.

However, as Professor Mansergh goes on to say, he entertained some large illusions about what his mission of pacification might entail. He hoped his task might be completed within a year or two of taking office and that the British people might atone for past injustice and ensure future co-operation in Ireland relatively painlessly by eliminating the privileges of the Protestant settler aristocracy. The “tall tree of noxious growth” would have the axe laid to its root, and that would be that. Gladstone was not yet aware that the basic issue was a confrontation of nationalities which reform alone would never answer, and perhaps in his heart he was more concerned about the conscience of England than about

righting the wrongs of Ireland. But would that there were more men in British politics today who saw even as far as he did, that nations and groups as well as individuals must repent of injustices and make restitution for them. A Christian nation, if there is such a thing, must have the Cross enshrined at the heart of its national policy.

Among nations, just as among domestic fowl, there is a pecking order. And cock of the walk, for nearly two centuries now, has been England – if not still in terms of power, at least in the attitudes of her people and the attitudes of other peoples to them. I say England and not Britain, for the reason that those who call, or have called, themselves British – Northern Ireland Protestants, Southern Irish Protestants, Scots, Australians, New Zealanders, English Canadians, English South Africans – are united in one thing, in being regarded as second-class by the English. Mostly they would like to be English, with Scots and Northern Irish usually excepted.

For those nations and groups at the bottom of the pile, those who have been most wronged, the necessary response is forgiveness. And it is remarkable how readily some of them, like Irish Catholics, like many Africans, take to it.

It is one thing that can help those nations and groups which have caused most of the injustice to find change and their true destiny. (But it is inappropriate to speak of mutual forgiveness, or the politics of forgiveness, as if all were equal in causing injustice. There must be at least an equal emphasis on repentance by the more privileged groups). Often it is not a simple matter of one group maltreating another. It may not be just the top dog and the underdog. There is often a middle dog as well, or a series of intermediary dogs. Such intermediaries provide a ready scapegoat –

to introduce another metaphorical animal – and enable a ruling nation to keep its hands clean. In “Two Centuries of Irish History” (Kegan Paul, Trench) Professor Bryce in 1888 showed that of all possible modes of administering a dependency that of leaving it to a dominant caste is the worst. “The operation of natural forces is interfered with; a natural remedy is prevented by the power of the superior country. The latter remains ignorant of the facts and insensible of her responsibilities. The dominant caste ceases to have patriotism, because it looks to the superior country for support and remains alienated from the mass of its fellow-countrymen. It has an interest in checking any progress which may threaten its own ascendancy”.

Repentance for a nation which has used other groups as its instruments involves looking both at the wrongs done to the oppressed and at what has been done to the souls and characters of those elements more directly involved in the oppression. In Ireland the Anglican landed aristocracy and gentry were the officers of England’s garrison. The rank and file were often tenant farmers, usually Presbyterian in the North, who were punished if they stepped out of line, but usually did what they were put there to do because of the attitudes of fear and contempt towards Catholics common to all Irish Protestants. A perceived threat, combined with guilty conscience, was enough to make them close the ranks, even against their own obvious interest, throughout most of the last 350 years, and these attitudes formed several centuries ago have persisted. W.S. Armour considered that the treatment of Irish Catholics was tantamount to killing the body while they preserved their soul intact, but that what has been done to the Protestants has killed their soul.

Several comparisons may be made with Ireland. In India Muslims and Sikhs were used as a garrison against the Hindu majority, the same divide and rule principle as in Ireland. Attitudes and motives were generated which led to the secession of Pakistan, very similar to those which created the Northern Ireland State, and today Sikhs are agitating for their independence also. A spurious claim to self-determination produced the dismemberment of India, which is if anything an even more striking cultural unity than Ireland. That spurious claim was made the more strongly because earlier a similar claim had been allowed to dismember the Irish nation, with the blessing of Britain and America.

In South Africa nothing but blame seems to attach to the Afrikaners. But what have been the factors making them what they are? The hurts of the Boer War have never been healed. Although they are the majority white community their culture was treated as second-class until the coming to power of the Nationalist Party. They are treated with contempt by English speakers both in South Africa and Commonwealth. The traditional emphasis of their Christianity on the Old Testament has produced feelings of being a chosen people. There is a parallel with Northern Irish Protestants who have felt themselves badly treated in the past and now treated with contempt by the English, and that they are a special people favoured by God. This combination of unresolved hurt, contempt and the sense of being special may be at the root of intransigence.

The explosive situation in the Middle East owes much to the intransigence of the Jews produced by similar factors. In one sense Britain created the problem by promising Palestine to Jews and Arabs at once, a cynical policy of expediency for short-term advantage. In another sense the whole of Christian Europe is

responsible by cruel treatment of the Jews over centuries, contrasting markedly with the generous treatment by Muslims of Jews and Christians alike. Living in ghettos, forced to practise usury because every other livelihood was closed to them, their present character developed. Suffering has made them the most gifted and sensitive people in the world – how wrong Hitler was to call them an inferior race – and at the same time grasping and ruthless. Millions killed in the holocausts are now almost matched by millions made homeless of a race which had never harmed them, while they are seemingly unaware that there is anything unjust or inconsistent.

It is one thing to state a problem or, as I have tried to do, to analyse it in terms of the psychology or perhaps the souls of nations or groups. It is quite another thing to find an answer – and perhaps there is none. But, as Gladstone believed, nations must face retribution and make atonement for wrongs done, and the souls of nations are like the souls of people. Could it be that nations can find forgiveness and redemption as the free gift of God as individuals can? As with individuals it may not be possible always to make full restitution, but surely God will honour and bless that nation which finds the will to understand and try to restore.

