

the wall is also a challenge. It has always been very easy for us on this island to blame others for our misfortunes and never to examine our own consciences or our own roles in bringing about situations. I believe that that wall presents a major challenge to the people of Ireland today, North and South, because we all play a part in the kind of thinking that has built it. The challenge is to examine our own attitudes and examine them without any rationalizing and without any pre-conditions. It is a challenge to re-think, because this is for certain: if our past attitudes have led us to this juncture, they need re-examination. And there ought to be no "sacred cows" in our examination of conscience.

It is a challenge to the Protestant tradition in Ireland, which is broadly Unionist; it is a challenge to the Nationalist tradition in Ireland, which is broadly Catholic; and it is a challenge to the British who rule the North of Ireland.

It is a challenge to the Protestants in the sense that they have, as a people of this island, always insisted on their difference and on their right to be different. That is something which I think ought have everyone's support because I think any country is richer for its diversity. If you look around the world today, you will find that the vast majority of democratic countries are united precisely because they respect their

diversity and because they do not seek to impose one tradition upon another. The Protestant objective of maintaining their difference and distinctiveness in Ireland is an objective every Irish person should support. My quarrel is with the *method* that some Protestants use to protect that distinctiveness and difference. This method has been clear and consistent down through the years. It has been to hold all power in their own hands, to have an exclusive use of power. They fear to let any power into the hands of those with whom they differ lest they lose their own distinctiveness. That attitude of mind is a root cause of violence because in any society, anywhere, if one group insists in holding all the power, it is imposing its will and attitudes on others and the net result is, inevitably, violence. We are living with the violence that has emanated from such attitudes being represented politically on this island.

The challenge to the Protestant tradition, of course, is to recognise that there are other ways of preserving their distinctiveness and difference that will not bring them into conflict with their fellow citizens. Were they to follow these ways, Protestants would not *want* to hold all power in their own hands. They would have more basic, simple, human respect for other people, for their attitudes, for their distinctiveness and for their point of view.

Next, we Roman Catholics must have a hard look at ourselves, at the Irish Nationalist/Republican/Catholic tradition. We have been handed down a version of patriotism, a notion of Ireland that is highly romanticized and which bears little relation to the realities of life in Ireland today. Ireland is not a piece of earth. The piece of earth that we *call* Ireland is already united; it is the *people* of that piece of earth who are divided. You cannot divide or unite people at the point of a gun. We have to face that reality. Part of our tradition of patriotism is a tradition of what is described as "the armed struggle". In reality, this leads to unjustified violence. In a country with a divided people we cannot achieve unity by killing one another. We still do not realise this: it simple cannot be done. This part of our tradition drives Protestants further apart from us. If we believe in it, we increase the bitterness which is at the heart of the problem of Northern Ireland. There is evidence of such belief all around us.

More than that, and this to me is very fundamental, if there is an attitude of mind in any society where a substantial number of people think that human life is secondary to a political objective, that you can kill for political reasons, then every single value in that society will be destroyed. For if human life is not sacred, what *is* sacred? If it is right to kill

for a political objective and for political power, what is wrong with telling lies? That's not as big an offence as killing somebody. What is wrong with stealing? What is wrong with the kid who robs a gas-meter to go to a disco if it is thought patriotic to take a life for a political objective. I think that our ambivalence on this issue must be confronted, and confronted harshly. We must recognise that, in the late twentieth century, patriotism has more to do with spilling sweat in building one's country than it has to do with spilling blood.

This also has to do with attitudes. As I said above, in Ireland we do not have a divided piece of earth; we have a divided people. This means that the first step on the road to real unity is the *acceptance of difference* instead of the notion that we should conquer the person who is different from us. We must abandon the thought of *converting* anybody. Instead, we must accept difference and show respect for a different point of view. We must desist from imposing our Catholic tradition on Protestants and learn to accept the fact that they are different and that that difference is a good thing. If we continue down the road of thinking the Catholic tradition in Ireland can impose its entire viewpoint on the Protestant one, we are not going down the road to unity; we are going down the road to further division.

Here let me repeat and stress a point I made

earlier. When you look across the world today, when you examine the many democratic societies that are stable, that are peaceful, that are united, you will see that the vast majority of them are stable, are peaceful and are united because they accept difference. They are built on constitutions which recognise their internal difference and respect their national diversity. That is the real basis of their unity, because unity cannot be won by conquest.

People who insist that their point of view, and their point of view alone, must be the predominant one, are people who have no faith in their own beliefs and no faith in their own values. This paradox is worth scrutinizing. If our convictions have roots that are deep enough and strong enough, then they will live — and let live.

The great contribution of the Irish to the world has been as a wandering people. We were the first “boat people”, the first great diaspora. The Irish who went across the world brought their beliefs with them and retained them. They accepted other nationalities and people from other lands but they retained their distinctive Irish roots. They made a remarkable contribution, in terms of Christian development and of political and democratic development, to many countries across the world. If the Irish who went overseas managed to live harmoniously with other nationalities,

why, on our own little piece of earth, do we think it is right to kill and die for Nationality?

Then there's the British who rule Northern Ireland — who in fact hold all power there. You would be forgiven, from time to time, for thinking that certain prominent politicians in the North of Ireland wield power. We do not wield any. All power resides with the British Government. And they have consistently taken an attitude, particularly in more recent times, that they are like harassed referees, keeping apart the warring factions of the wild Irish. They are *not* referees; they are part of the problem and they must be part of the solution. Their attitudes and politics are very much part of the problem. These, can be summarised in three basic points.

The first and most devastating policy is the one which gives a guarantee to one section of the population: that as long as they remain in the majority they will be protected. That seems very democratic in one way but just look at the position in view of the origins of Northern Ireland as an entity. Northern Ireland was deliberately carved out of the map of this island with its territory chosen because of the size of its sectarian majority. Now the British Government says to that artificially created majority: “you can remain the way you are as long as you have a majority”. What, in effect, are the British Government forcing Protestants

to do? They are trapping them into sectarian solidarity. They know this is the means of maintaining power because their power is based on a sectarian headcount in the first place. It is hardly surprising that Protestants wish to maintain sectarian solidarity; it is the basis of their power and their privileges. Unfortunately, that ensures a permanent division in the community based on sectarianism. It prevents any real effort at the healing process that is necessary if we are to solve our problems. Britain must realise that there is another way. That other way must relate to promoting the acceptance of diversity, promoting the accommodation of difference in Ireland as the basis of peace, stability and unity.

The second theme of current policy is that any system of government or any devolution of power must have widespread community acceptance, must be acceptable to both sides. In practice, that is short-hand for "power-sharing". But that is not a policy. It is an aspiration. Because Britain does not implement that policy, it allows a section of the community to veto it. That veto derives from the first part of the policy where an unconditional guarantee has been given.

The third element of the policy is the one that is called "firm security": root out those who commit violence by firm security measures. In

practice, in its practical application on the ground, that policy is a contradiction of the political policy of bringing people together.

Let me give you an example. The "Emergency Provisions Act" is the name of the emergency legislation in Northern Ireland. In the last twelve years 60,000 people have been arrested under that Act. When I remind you that there are 600,000 Catholics in Northern Ireland you will realise what I am talking about. The 60,000 people arrested were mostly Catholics under the age of 25. They were held for periods ranging from forty-eight hours to seven days. When you consider that only 12% of them were ever charged with anything and that 70% of them were only asked questions about what other people were doing, then you can see that this legislation is not being used to bring people to justice but as an intelligence-gathering mechanism. There needs to be a complete re-appraisal of the system if justice is to be done.