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Mr B McAvoys

MASS FOR THE ETERNAL REST OF

THE LATE SEAMUS McAVOY

in St. Patrick's Church, Donegall Street, Belfast
on Monday, 2nd. September, 1985, at 7.30 p.m.

HOMILY BY BISHOP CAHAL B. DALY
of Down and Connor

There have been many occasions of grief and desolation in our country over the past decade and a half. One becomes almost inured to tragedy, almost incapable of finding words to express one's feelings of shock and indignation. Seldom in my life, however, have I experienced such heart-rending grief as in the Dublin City Mortuary on Thursday, 22nd. August, when the remains of Seamus McAvoys were removed to begin the

distressful journey home to Coalisland. The sorrow of his wife Maura and of their six children, Patrick, Paul, Conor, Shane, Orla and Emer, could not be described. Words of sympathy just would not come to one's lips. One could only pray with them and weep with them, and weep for them and weep also for what is happening to Ireland, our beloved country.

As I watched the stricken family bending over the coffin of their dead husband and father - the coffin could not be opened because of what the bullets had done to the head and face - I found myself thinking that if the killers were only there they could not but be moved to remorse and repentance for what they had done. Those who carry out such crimes, those who plan them and give the orders for them, those who belong to the organisations which condone and support and attempt to justify them, are usually themselves family men, with wives and children whom they love and by whom they are loved. May God in His pity grant that their dear ones may never have to suffer the heartbreak which they have inflicted on the wives and children of their victims.

CO-OPERATORS IN MURDER

For each man who pulls the lethal trigger or who plants or detonates the fatal bomb, there are many others who share with him in the guilt of murder. There are those who lead the organisation and who are jointly responsible for all its decisions and deeds of death. There are those who report on the victim's movements, those who hide weapons,

those who provide "safe houses". There are people in our community who would never handle a gun or plant a bomb, but who nonetheless bear the guilt of murder on their souls because of their cooperation before and after its performance.

It is a matter of deep distress and worry to me as bishop that there are some Catholics who have so let the eyes of their soul become darkened that they no longer recognise sin as sin. I ask you to join with me in this Eucharist in praying that eyes that have become blind may be given sight, consciences that have become hardened and closed may be touched by God and opened to the light of His truth and love.

IDEALISM BETRAYED

I do not doubt but that in the IRA/Sinn Fein organisation there are persons who entered the movement for idealistic reasons. They may have been outraged in their youth by the internment of relatives, the burning of family homes or the intimidation of Catholic areas by loyalist mobs, the denial of justice in employment or promotion, the obstinate resistance to peaceful proposals for just political change. They may have thought they were engaging in a noble struggle for justice. I ask them now to reflect on where that early idealism has led them. They find themselves forced now to carry out or to

approve and attempt to condone dreadful deeds and practices of which they could never have thought themselves capable fifteen or ten or even five years ago. Their first idealism is now being tested by events. The Ireland they profess to love has supped too full of the tears and the blood of brother and sister Irishmen, slain or grief-stricken through supposed love for Ireland. True idealism, authentic love of country, moral integrity, require that they now have the courage to stand up and say: "Enough. I at least shall no longer be part of this perversion of patriotism". Padraig Pearse surrendered to British forces in 1916 in order to prevent further slaughter of innocent civilians. Those who themselves slay innocent civilians have no right to invoke his name.

NON-VIOLENT STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

It is difficult to renounce a movement for which one has made great sacrifices and endured much hardship. It looks like writing off years of one's life as waste and error and failure. But if there was initial idealism and passion for justice, there is no infidelity to one's cause or one's comrades or oneself in renouncing a violent campaign which has become a betrayal of idealism and now committing oneself to the struggle for justice by non-violent means, by which alone true justice can be established.

There is injustice in Northern Ireland. The existing political institutions do not give just recognition to the nationalist identity or provide just safeguards for nationalists' rights.

There is grave and continuing and even increasing injustice in employment practices and in the distribution of unemployment. The injustice is embedded in the political and economic institutions of society. There is imperative need for non-violent struggle against injustice. Idealism which has been betrayed could be redeemed by commitment to this non-violent struggle. An honourable place in history could still be won by those who have a real concern for deprived persons and communities and who have a commitment to political action on their behalf. But this honourable place will be won only by those who have the courage to renounce violence and commit themselves to unambiguous support for the unarmed struggle for justice.

RUC INSPECTOR VANCE

I have just witnessed another scene of grief and heartbreak in another Irish household and at another Irish funeral, that of RUC Inspector Martin Vance, murdered at his quiet home in a peaceful countryside on Saturday morning. His widow, Patricia, and his three children, Stephen, Mark and Andrew, plunged into anguish by the murder of a dear husband and father, join the long list of innocent sufferers from a sullied and sinful campaign. When a Catholic is murdered by fellow-Catholics purporting to act in the name of the Catholic community, all Catholics are summoned to repentance and to make atonement to God for the sinfulness lurking within our community. A Catholic bishop above all is summoned to more intense personal prayer and reparation and to still greater determination to proclaim God's law fearlessly and to work for reconciliation tirelessly.

RESPECT FOR UNIONIST RIGHTS

But it is not just because Inspector Vance was a Catholic that, in God's name, I condemn and deplore his murder. To regard members of the RUC as "legitimate targets" is to attack the very basis of a just and reconciled society in the North. The RUC have been described recently as part of the "occupying forces". Let us reflect on the logic of that phrase. The members of the RUC are Irish men and women, some them nationalists, the majority of them of unionist persuasion. What can unionists conclude from the phrase except that unionists themselves are held to be part of the "occupying forces". Are they then to be driven out of Ireland before Ireland can be free and at peace? The IRA/Sinn Fein campaign is claimed to be waged against British Forces. More and more it has assumed the form and the reality of a campaign waged against the unionist community. So far from being a "national struggle" against a foreign enemy, it has become an inter-Irish struggle of one Irish community against another Irish community. This way, nothing but disaster and misery and self-inflicted destruction can lie ahead for both communities.

What has the IRA/Sinn Fein movement to say to unionists? What has it to offer them? All it says to them now is said with bullets. Bullets convey their own political message, a message of death. The political message of the armalite is death also to all hope of true justice in Ireland. The whole lesson of our history is that justice for one community cannot be built upon injustice to the other. Unionist rights must be

regarded by nationalists as sacrosanct; but unionists must learn that they morally may not and politically cannot impose a unionist identity or unionist political institutions on an unwilling 40% of the community. Nationalist rights must be regarded by unionists as equally sacrosanct; but nationalists must learn that they morally may not and politically cannot impose a nationalist identity or nationalist political institutions on an unwilling 60% of the community. It is an honoured slogan that "Ireland unfree can never be at peace"; but Ireland can be free only when it is perceived to be as free for unionists as it is for nationalists; Ireland can be free only when it is freed from unionist denial of nationalist rights, but at the same time freed from nationalist threat to unionist rights.

There are many men and women of high moral principle, intelligence and integrity in the unionist community who see all this and who are ready to accept and to advocate the changes required by justice. It is virtually impossible for them to speak out publicly so long as the IRA campaign continues. If the IRA campaign were to cease, or even to be only suspended, I am convinced that there would be overwhelming moral force behind the demand for the political and structural changes which are an absolute and urgent requirement of justice. To call off, or even only to suspend, the physical force campaign would be an act of true Irish and republican patriotism. It would, I am deeply convinced, be the greatest single contribution which could be made at the present time, to the establishment of a just society, where both nationalists and unionists could live in peace and with the hope of a better future for all our children.

"MORAL BLACKMAIL?"

In our cynical age, much of what I have said may be dismissed as "moral blackmail". If this be so, then I reply that the greatest "moral blackmail" in history was Jesus' dying for us on the Cross. He died so that we could be reconciled with God and with one another. Non-violent victim of human violence, Jesus died so as to "kill the hostility" setting brother against brother, children of a common Father. From the Cross he prayed: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing": they do not know that it is me they are killing when they kill one another. We join our prayers in this Mass with his supreme sacrifice on the Cross, imploring the Father's forgiveness for the killers of Seamus McAvoy, the killers of Inspector Martin Vance, the killers of so many victims of this great Christian and national tragedy which is violence.

Jesus, who said, "blessed are they who hunger and thirst after justice" (Matthew 5:6) is the same Lord who said, "put back your sword into its scabbard", (Matthew 26:52); "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:34); "blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). In him is our peace (cfr Ephesians 2:14); in him alone lies our sure and certain hope for peace in Ireland, peace through prayer, repentance, reconciliation and the moral power of non-violent struggle for justice. May the Lord make us worthy of that call and help us to respond to it with all our mind and heart and strength.