

## FORUM REPORT

# 'No need or place' for a federal solution

A NORTHERN Presbyterian, Dr George Dallas, argued in a submission to the Forum that true Protestantism, since it respected Christian morality, "will be safer in a united country where this respect is held by the vast majority of the citizens."

His submission, which was supported by a group of Northern Catholics, Southern members of the Church of Ireland, and a member of the Church of England, said that the best solution for the country was a unitary state, and there was no place or need for a federal solution.

"The real need at this stage is for honest talk between the representatives of the Irish and British nations," he said. "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."

Catholics and Protestants in Ireland had a common inheritance in such concepts as sin, repentance, forgiveness and redemption. The entire Northern Protestant community was ridden by guilt, the paper declared, and repentance for hatred and contempt of the Catholic community would have the effect that Protestants could begin to feel fully 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."

Political Protestantism involved the retention of power in Protestant hands over all aspects of life, and was a continuing source of fear to Catholics in many areas as the ultimate sanction for it was the threat of sectarian murder, it went on. Britain was involved too as loyalist power rested on the blackmail of the bloodbath.

## Unjust society

A more urgent priority than the repentance of Northern Protestants was that of the British as unionists were unlikely to change their attitudes while the present relationship of dependence and blackmail was allowed to persist. The British were ultimately responsible for the situation because they were the sovereign power.

"Any answer to violence," the paper added, "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."

The people of the North, both Catholic and Protestant, felt that they were misunderstood by the whole mass of the people in the South, both Catholic and Protestant.

"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 18th and 19th centuries.

## Propaganda

"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."

The Northern Catholic community lived with frustration and a sense of abandonment, the paper said. It had never been considered or consulted by London or Dublin since the first Home Rule Bill, and certainly not between 1919 and 1922.

In spite of reservations, however, the great majority of Northern Catholics remained convinced of the necessity for a united Ireland.

"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," the paper added. "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 citizens."

Any apparent weakening by constitutional parties on sovereignty to accommodate Northern Protestants would leave a clear field for extremists, the paper said. As far as Protestants were concerned, nothing would work except a full, glad and willing acceptance of their Irishness. The best solution was a unitary state, with 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."

Apart from Dr Dallas, the paper was signed by James Roderick Evans, a southern member of the Church of Ireland, James Kevin Lynn and Patrick Alphonsus Lynn, Northern Catholics, Alexander Montgomery Ritchie, Northern Presbyterian, Joan Alice Tapsfield, Church of England, and Samuel Eric Turpin, Southern Church of Ireland.

In an additional paper on constitutional aspects, Dr Evans argued that Northern Ireland was a separate political entity in the United Kingdom and that the Twenty-six Counties were a separate state, but only part of a nation.