Sociology, Religion and "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland: A Critical Approach

JOHN FULTON
St. Mary's College of Higher Education, Twickenham, England

Abstract: In a dialogue with specific contributions to the debate on the role of religion in "the Troubles", a link between religion and conflict emerges: it occurs in the political theologies of churchmen and laity alike (monopoly Catholicism on the one hand, evangelical elitism and a populist Covenant-type politics on the other). Religious elements are also seen to be mediated by elites to unchurched Loyalists. But basic to a recognition of religion's role is to focus on the entire island and its two historical *blocs* (a term preferred to "ethnic groups"), Catholic-Nationalist and Protestant-Loyalist, as the underlying factors or structures of conflict behind the two "States", to which *blocs'* solidarity denominational religion continues to contribute.

U ntil recently, historians and sociologists have tended to the view that "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland were significantly religious in the past, but marginally so today. In their reviews of explanations of the Northern Ireland conflict, Darby (1976), Hickey (1984), Hunter (1982), Lijphart (1975) and Whyte (1978 and 1986) find few giving any real weight to causes of a religious kind. True, most mention that loyalists of the North (such as Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson) and two past Southern politicians (C. Cruise O'Brien 1974 and Garrett FitzGerald 1972) consider that "the troubles" and their underlying social structures have a religious dimension. For Paisley, separation of six-County Ulster from the South is necessary because the South is a Catholic state which would be imposed on Protestants in an all-Ireland state structure. Elements of the Catholic nature of the present Southern state which are considered obstacles to improved relations in Ireland have been itemised by O'Brien and FitzGerald: the moral articles of the Constitution of 1937, especially the one forbidding divorce, the limitations on family plan-

ning in the criminal law and the seemingly inordinate power of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy to affect the outcome of democratic processes.

But most commentators treat these issues of religion as peripheral to the heart of the matter, which is varyingly explained in terms of imperialism and the British presence (e.g., Farrell 1976, 1977; Reed, 1984), dependency theory (Hechter, 1975) or the national or separate ethnic nature of the Protestant-loyalist grouping (British and Irish Communist Organization, 1971; Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, 1979). This group has recently been joined by MacDonald (1986) who gives religion a surface weight but similarly looks to colonialism and group domination for deeper causal explanations.

One person who gives a resounding no to the question of religion's relevance is McAllister (1982). He attempts to settle the argument by using positive methodology as Rose (1971) has formerly done. But whereas Rose found some contribution of religion to the diametrically opposed and intractable identities of the two groupings in Northern Ireland, and additionally in the separate schooling system, MacAllister rejects any real religious causality. He adopts available secondary data for his analysis. The primary data are those of John Jackson's Irish mobility survey of the male population in 1973 and Moxon-Browne's (1983) Northern Ireland attitude survey conducted in 1978. Moxon-Browne is used by McAllister to correct the male bias of the Jackson survey.

Data from the two surveys are employed to construct measures of religious commitment, socio-economic position and political attitudes. McAllister conceptualises religious commitment in three parts: ritual, religious self-definition (he terms this "devotion") and belief in the supernatural and uses primary data to measure these for both Catholic and Protestant males and females. He then constructs measures of specific political attitudes for the same people, those *attitudes* which he believes can be used to identify true *causes* of the conflict: for Catholics, discrimination over housing and jobs, the influence of the Orange Order, of the Special Powers Act and of the UVF, and internment; for Protestants, the IRA, the disloyalty of Catholics towards the UK, the weak Labour government of 1969 and the poor border security offered by the Irish Republic. McAllister uses multi-variate analysis to trace the link between religious commitment and socio-economic characteristics. Then he uses multiple regression to measure the effect of religious commitment and socio-economic characteristics on political attitudes.

In his findings, there appears little relationship between respondents' Catholic/Protestant attitudes to the conflict and the strength of their religious commitment. McAllister therefore concludes that there is *no* important relationship between religion and the political conflict:

[. . .] religious commitment is only weakly related to political attitudes for Protestants, and unrelated for Catholics. The hypothesis that the Northern Ireland conflict centres on religious values and behaviour is therefore rejected. (McAllister, 1982, 342).

Finding similarly against economic explanations, he concludes that Rose's choice of the two-nation theory is to be preferred as an explanation of the problem, but notes that (in Rose's formulation of the theory) it implies that there is no political solution.

There are a number of difficulties with McAllister's analysis. One of these is that it is based on a random sample of the Ulster population as a whole and really does not take account of the question whether or not politically salient groups in the population, such as political elites, might provide a mediating link between religion and politics. In her study of Protestant politicians in Ulster, MacIver (1988) shows that there is a strong relationship between political views and religious views among this elite, particularly when one is talking about fundamentalist groups such as the Democratic Unionist Party leadership, the party most open to confrontation and to preserving the distinct identity of Northern Ireland. She shows that 80 per cent of the politicians in the Democratic Unionist Party are Free Presbyterians, and that these tend to view their political vocation as their religious vocation as well. This comes over most strongly in the data which show that their vision of God is that of a just judge more than of a compassionate lord, and that this god operates his judgments by direct intervention in history, blessing those who fulfil his will. In the context of Northern Ireland, how this will is to be fulfilled is clear: to keep out the evil influence of the Church of Rome which has made of the Republic a godless country, and to preserve the North for a Protestant people. Such action is seen by the political, religious leadership to be blessed by God, who has promised to show his mercy on their behalf. MacIver also shows clear support by this religious group for the Afrikaaners in South Africa, and their opposition to "communism" in the form of the black liberation movement. This provides indirect evidence of the political nature of their Protestant religion, as they see a clear parallel between the beleaguered positions of both groups: evidence, that is, for those who find the political-religious nature of the Afrikaaner position crystal clear. Similar conclusions are come to by Bruce (1986) in his in-depth analysis of Paisley's rise to religious and political power and the accompanying phenomenon of Paisleyism, and also by Wallis and Bruce (1986, 227-291) in their comparative analysis of conservative Protestantism.

Thus, there can be no doubt of the political thrust of the religious beliefs of the DUP leadership. Hence, already with MacIver, Bruce and Wallis' data, there appears to be a *mediated* link between religion and political action, pro-

vided by the political elite acting as "interpreters" of the religious and moral consciousness of the voting Protestant population. That these leaders articulate well the consciousness of half of that population is attested partly by the fact that they vote DUP, and partly by the fact that, before the emergence of this political party, loyalist prime ministers of Northern Ireland who sought compromise with the Catholic nationalists were unceremoniously dumped by their supporters at the ballot box (Capt. Terence O'Neill, James Chicester-Clark). But *up to what point* the voting population share certain religious presuppositions with the DUP leadership is not quite clear at this juncture.

There are of course other equally serious problems with McAllister's analysis. One relates to the measures he uses. There are three measures indicating belief in the supernatural: belief in the devil, hell and the afterlife; belief in divine providence; and belief in the historical truth of Bible miracles. These may have been the only indices available to him in the surveys he was using. But a) such measures do not grasp the wide forms of Christian belief in the supernatural. One need hardly say that "commitment to Christ" and "sense of God" would have been infinitely more preferable and consonant with varieties of Christian commitment today, even in Northern Ireland. Also, b) the use of the variables actually adopted to construct a scale of belief in the supernatural is likely to confuse the distinction between fundamentalism and other forms of Christian belief. McAllister is thus likely to compound any resulting error when he comes to examining the relationship between religious commitment and political attitudes. Again, c) too rational an approach to the said political attitudes, taking believed causes of the troubles as indices of each community's contribution to actual conflict, is to assume that real, historical conflict is directly and principally related to perceptions of its causes, and that the perceptions do in fact constitute causes. This begs a whole range of questions on the nature of the relationship between subjective perceptions, social action and social conflict.

The last point leads to the central problem of McAllister's analysis: d) he concludes that because there is little direct link between the religious "values" he analyses and the concrete political conflict in Northern Ireland, there is little or no link *at all* between religion and "the Troubles". However, all that McAllister has established is that there appears to be no direct link between, on the one hand, the strength of religious practice, religious self-definition and belief in the devil, the afterlife, hell, God's providence and Bible miracles and, on the other, the strength of the same people's antagonistic explanations of the conflict. This does not mean that there is no link between *other* firmly held beliefs, attitudes, practices and religious relationships and the same people's explanation of the conflict — even more, of what they might be prepared to *do* if they were called on to participate in political or violent action

should the turn of events demand new decisions and re-evaluations of belief, irrespective of previously asserted attitudes. Put another way, McAllister fails to distinguish between the consciously social psychological impact of some religious beliefs and that of others. He particularly ignores the less conscious levels of "deep seated moods and motivations" (Geertz, 1966) which may surface in other settings, particularly when it comes to making real historical decisions and taking political action.

Political-Religious Beliefs

This mistake is not made by Wright (1973). His recent book (1987) makes use of some of this early material in a comparative, international perspective but without much further illumination on the religious factor. In the first work, a lengthy article in *The European Journal of Sociology* (1973), he attempts to delineate the "ideologies" which Ulster Protestants have of Catholics and considers such ideologies as semi-autonomous structures which legitimate Protestant political activity and which cover over and legitimate non-religious dimensions to the conflict. Wright sees Protestant ideology as structuring perception of Catholics, and all the more powerfully when its knowledge can replace face-to-face experience — when there is little or no contact between the two sides, when the holder of the ideology is under threat either in terms of violence or in terms of job competition. For Wright, there are two principal types of Protestant ideology, "liberal" and "extreme". The liberal variety is held by those who do not see the Catholics as a total and uncompromising threat to their world-view and society, and are prepared to bind in the Catholic population to the structures of Unionism or into some political party structure which is prepared to accept the union with Britain, such as the old Northern Ireland Labour Party (still in existence when Wright wrote his 1973 paper), and the present (NI) Alliance party. He finds the "extreme" Protestants to exist in large numbers. They are

> those who see the Roman Catholic community as a monolithic and authoritarian structure, implacably hostile to protestants and protestantism. (Wright, 1973, 216)

Both liberals and extremists consider the Roman Catholic Church as exercising power on the community but, whereas the former see that power in a rapid state of decline, the latter view its power as unquenchable: it is held that the Catholic Church will not be happy until all Protestant opposition is eliminated. Wright defines the interpretation of Roman Catholicism held by Protestant extremists as a view that

> Roman Catholicism is inherently political and inimicable to the political and religious liberties of Protestants: that because Roman Catholicism

is political, Protestantism must also be political but for defensive reasons. (Wright, 1973, 224)

Hence Wright uncovers the "religio-political ideology" of extreme Protestanism. He shows how this perception expands what he sees as a residue of truth about Roman Catholicism, the power of its clergy, into a full-blown interpretation and condemnation of Roman Catholics and the Southern Irish state.

Wright's contribution to the understanding of Ulster Unionism and its religious aspects has been incisive and remains in many respects a base line for reflection on Northern Protestant ideologies. However, his paper was probably better received by Catholic nationalists than by Protestant loyalist sympathisers as it targeted the Protestants. Unless one applies a similar critique to Catholic nationalist ideology, the full impact of such a technique of analysis is not experienced. The way is open to ignore the impact of Catholic nationalist realities on Protestant loyalists, for there appears to be little basis for Protestant fear of Catholic religion. Protestant ideologies appear blacker than they deserve and carry a weight of opprobrium they might in reality share with their oppositional counterpart. It becomes necessary to assert the perceptions and frameworks established by social anthropologists, particularly Harris (1972) and Leyton (1966 and 1975). Both of these stress the importance of understanding the patterns of interaction and separation of the Protestant and Catholic groupings. Leyton additionally explores Catholic-Protestant oppositional world-views of the biblical narrative to fill out the meanings of such patterns (though the importance of such work on explicit religious beliefs has since often been missing, as in the otherwise excellent study of commonsense knowledge in a Catholic ghetto by Burton, 1978).

Of course, in analyses undertaken largely before "the Troubles", Harris and Leyton almost give the impression that the differences between Catholic nationalist and Protestant loyalist can co-exist (Harris) or be almost structurally functional (Leyton). Wright, instead, begins with conflict. It is crucially important to develop his work by relating oppositional action between the groups of Catholic nationalists and Protestant loyalists to their respective ideologies if "the Troubles" are to be understood in a more comprehensive way.

Ethnic-Religious Separateness and Status-Honour

Aspects of Wright's analysis are developed by Wallis, Bruce & Taylor (1986). They base their assertions around the concept of ethnicity and argue from the structure of group identity. But, though the argument of Wallis *et al.*, centres on ethnicity, it is the particular theory that the essence of ethnicity lies in *status-honour* that forms the heart of their argument:

> Ethnicity crucially rests upon *cultural* or *symbolic* differences, i.e. differences of belief and behaviour, not — despite attempted racial stereotyping — upon difference of physical structure and appearance. Loss or attentuation of these symbolic differences erodes what is distinctive about the group and thus jeopardises its claims to superior social honour. (Wallis, Bruce & Taylor, 1986, 6)

They argue that certain types of Protestant belief are crucial to the legitimation of Ulster unionist, Protestant superiority over Catholic nationalists, and are thus essential to the maintenance of their higher state and control of Northern Ireland. The beliefs are a particular form of evangelical Protestantism. When all other layers of belief are stripped away (such as unionism) as, according to the authors, they may well be, there will remain the *need* to rely on a core of *religious belief* as this forms the last resort of a separate group identity which guarantees their superior position. Not all members of the group subscribe to these beliefs, but they will be forced to rally round them because there is really nothing else in their ideology which can mark them off or point up their superiority to Catholic nationalists. Thus Wallis *et al.*, point to the problem of conflict in Northern Ireland as one between two ethnic groups. One of these groups holds evangelical Protestantism, particularly as represented by Paisley, as the only ultimate status marker. Wallis *et al.*, argue that even secularised working-class Protestants must ultimately resort to it if they are to have a rallying point for the maintenance of their cause (cf. also Wallis and Bruce, 1986, 227-293).

Wallis, Bruce and Taylor also mention that a Protestant *socialist* party has never gained much support because

> It threatens to erode precisely what differentiates loyalism from contemporary militant republicanism, and thus the basis for a claim to legitimate separation of the two states and therefore the very existence of the Protestant ethnic group. (1986, 13)

Though the authors make the fear of socialism originate in Protestantism as a status value, it does remain that anti-socialism and pro-capitalism then constitute *another* status-marker no matter how one theorises their relationship to the religious element. One notes how, in this theory, belief in the union with Britain itself becomes a status-marker, though of declining importance, increasingly inessential as the power of Protestant evangelism grows.

The authors remain unique in their assertion of the centrality of Protestanism as a political status-marker even for the unchurched Protestant workers of Belfast. This analysis is important in that it uses a Weberian notion of ethnicity (Weber, 1968, 387-388), which factor acts as the hidden motivation for religious rationalisation. It parallels Durkheim's theorising of religion as

the normal requirement for the development of *homo duplex*, that is of stable, integrated human individuals and stable, integrated human groups: especially when another equivalent belief-system such as an integral nationalism is not available. Such a framework would appear to make a great deal more sense of Protestant-loyalist identity than many other interpretations.

However, one should note that in Wallis, Bruce and Taylor (1986) and in Wright (1973), the explanation is only *secondarily* a religious one. Religion is either the ultimate status-marker — a need for the group, as they have nothing left to hang their identity on — or acts as fuel for the fires of sectarianism by justifying in a (false) religious way the struggle against Catholicism and a united Ireland. However, Wallis and Bruce (1986) go beyond this perspective to affirm a greater degree of religious causality. They examine the possibility of a connection between the Calvinist belief in predestination to heaven for the "elect" — in the case of the Boers, the members of the Dutch Reformed Church, and in the case of Northern Ireland, born-again Christians — and the maintenance of a politics of separation from the "unsaved". The link is plausible and hardly resistable, and goes beyond status-honour considerations and legitimating functions. It takes into account Weber's insistence on the relevance of both "material" and "spiritual" interests for an understanding of the social and political consequences of religious beliefs. The argument is strengthened by the fact that Northern Ireland Protestants are considerably more religious than practically any other white Protestant group in the world, a fact which is frequently ignored by many seeking understanding of "the Troubles". Almost half the "Protestants" attend religious services on a weekly basis and two-thirds monthly (cf. Wallis, Bruce & Taylor, 1986, 6, taken from Moxon-Browne's unpublished data).

Wallis and Bruce's approach does not, however, provide an answer to Wright's view of a false ideological process going on in the Protestant collective conscience *vis-à-vis* the Catholic nationalists of Ireland. To face up to Wright's argument, it is necessary to ask: if there is a link between Protestant beliefs and political practice (spurious or real), why should there not be one also between Catholicism and the political practice of its believers? And if so, then this reality would surely *co-constitute* the mutual antagonism of Protestant loyalists and Catholic nationalists. It cannot be disputed that Protestants both fear an actual Southern Irish State deeply influenced by the Roman Catholic Church and the intention of the Provisionals and a hard core of the Southern Fianna Fail party to bring about Irish unity. Whether such a state would be dominated by Catholic nationalists will be examined shortly. At the same time, Catholic nationalists oppose oppression by Protestant loyalists in Ulster as well as maintaining that their own aspirations to a politically united Ireland are both legitimate and, for some, only a requirement of justice. If such fears

and aspirations and the actions of each group (or members of the group) against the other have some interaction, then such a social reality itself requires a degree of comprehension. *Real* relationships are important here to understand the nature of beliefs: discrimination against Catholic nationalists in the fields of housing and jobs, their exclusion from the political decision-making process in Northern Ireland; the real relationship between Catholic nationalists throughout the island as a majority intent on Irish unity and the minority of Protestant loyalists seeking some form of protection against this eventuality. To adopt a subjective meaning approach irrespective of the objective conditions seems a little too far adrift at this point.

Two Opposed Approaches to Political Christianity
One can now explore the Protestant-loyalist defensive position in the religious institutional sphere: is the "extreme" Protestant view to be seen as a totally false perception of the historical reality of power of the Roman Catholic Church either in Ireland or elsewhere? Wallis *et al.*, pay no attention to this possibility *because* they are focussing on the Protestants of Northern Ireland. In the case of Wright, the invocation of Protestantism by Protestant loyalists is a justification for a totally spurious interpretation of the beliefs, aspirations and political practices of Irish Roman Catholics and their church. For Wright (1973), Protestants as Protestants are wrong about a Catholic monolith. By 1987, Wright has clearly changed this view of things and has become more aware of Roman Catholic monopoly politics, about which more below. But he has not yet developed this insight to correct his views of 1973.

One writer who develops the link between religion and politics for both sides is Hickey (1984). Politics for loyalists is

> a simple matter of protecting the Protestant homeland, and Protestantism remains the religion which it was in early post-Reformation England — a bulwark against the imperialism of Rome on the one hand, and a defence of the purity of the Christian faith against the errors of Popery on the other. (Hickey, 1984, 67-68)

Hickey also implies that church doctrines are also mediated via social organisation. He gives the example of the institutionalisation of the priesthood in Roman Catholicism, based on the sacramental principle, but leading also to a social consequence of political import, the power of the clergy over the laity in the socio-moral and public sphere:

> Because of its power in terms of control ... [the Roman Catholic church] constitutes a very real threat to the existence of Reformed Christianity and, equally important, is able to exert a controlling — if hidden — influence over the *political* institutions of the society in which it oper-

ates. Looked at this way, the doctrinal stand of the Roman Catholic Church poses a very real threat to the existence of Protestant Northern Ireland. (Hickey, 1984, 70; cf. also Darby, 1976, 169)

Hickey then summarises the religious aspect of "the Troubles":

> The peculiarity about Northern Ireland is that the conflict which took place in the remainder of Europe and in the United States some centuries ago is taking place in this province *now*. (Hickey, 1984, 81)

He finds the religious cause to be determined by the initially similar but ultimately contrasting conceptions of church and mission of the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. All Christians hold a world-view by which they constitute a church separate from society, a group which has a divine mission to fulfil: to spread the gospel and convert the remaining members of society, shaping the institutions of society (family, politics, education, economy) in such a way as to "allow their beliefs to come to full fruition" (Hickey, 1984, 82). The difference comes in the manner in which the church and the relationship between human and divine — the means of grace — are understood. The Roman Catholic variant of this is that the Church must maintain the deposit of faith in its integrity and, therefore must enforce orthodoxy, sanctioning those who fail to conform through the clergy's power to refuse the means of grace, the sacraments:

> The *mission* of the Church, so conceived, will not be only to spread the gospel of its founder into every level of society, but also to control the manner in which that message is not only disseminated but interpreted. This means that, ideally, the Church must attempt to permeate all the other institutions in society; and not just permeate but, if possible, control them so that the society itself becomes a place wherein not only is the *depositum fidei* [deposit of faith] preserved but its social potential realised and the City of God achieved. This means *control*, and control not just of the committed members of the Church but also of the means by which the whole society regulates itself — that is, the political institution (government), the family institution (which provides the socialisation for the future members of society), the educational institution (expressed, now, in the formal school system) and the economic institution. (Hickey, 1984, 83)

Hickey recognises that this type of church existed prior to the Reformation and that, since then, it has succeeded in recovering similar status in three of the four provinces of Ireland (Munster, Leinster and Connaught, but not Ulster) at the cultural level.

Hickey goes on to consider the nature of the state for Protestants. Because

they conceive of salvation as individually conferred and by faith alone, the public sphere is not populated by a visible church; so that the influencing by their churches of political decisions can only take place through their members, clergy included, submitting themselves to the democratic process in order to be elected as their political representatives (Hickey, 1984, 85). Reviewing the pamphlets and booklets of contemporary Protestant leaders and writers such as Ian Paisley (Free Presbyterian), Martin Smyth (Presbyterian), and M.W. Dewar (Church of Ireland), Hickey points up what he sees to be the enormous range of religious opinion among Northern Protestants, their corresponding sense of liberty (which has political implications) and their agreed consensus to unite in the political arena:

> [. . .] the Protestant view of religion sees Christians as coming together to form the "city of the holy". This city is created by the voluntary cohesion of believers who join together to form a society based upon the creed of a common belief. This belief is adhered to voluntarily and does not have imposed upon it the dogmatic authority of a hierarchically organised Church basing its claim upon the transmission of grace through its clergy. (Hickey, 1984, 86)

The Roman Church is distrusted because it appears as a "monolith" which politically disregards the liberty Protestants hold so dearly.

Hickey puts down the increase in violence and social conflict to aspects of modernisation: the emergence of an educated Roman Catholic middle class, capable and articulate politically and produced by changes in welfare and educational provision imposed by the Westminster government, overthrowing the enforced stability of Northern Ireland society, pushing issues of economic and civil equality more to the fore, while at the same time making the religious basis of the differentiation of the two groups more and more evident (cf. Hickey, 1984, 89-105).

Hickey is right to see Northern Ireland not as a relic of the past but one of the remaining areas of the West where a specific political and religious question has not yet been determined. His argument on the political nature of *some* religion also tends to lend ammunition to those who support the thesis that Northern Protestants are a people apart. However, he thinks that Protestants *and* Catholics of six-county Ulster are culturally different from the rest of Ireland, not least because of sixty years of separate state development. With common features growing,

> religious beliefs and the political ideology linked with them are becoming increasingly prominent in distinguishing the two groups. (Hickey, 1984, 93)

One should perhaps notice that none of the sociologists mentioned above has operated *beyond* the boundaries of the Northern Ireland statelet to understand "the problem", though it is possible for all except Hickey to do so and extend the field of explanation at least by drawing inferences, e.g., that "the" problem is mainly the Northern Protestants, not the "rest" of the Irish. Hickey is the only one who explicitly treats Northern Ireland as a cultural entity. This is both a strength and a weakness of the argument. Clearly the weight of institutional separation from the rest of Ireland, involving massively different welfare and schooling provision, and a different standard of living for sixty years, have had an impact, even apart from any long-standing developed cultural similarities in temperament developed over 300 years. As Hickey shows in his survey conducted in 1976 of an area in a northern part of six-county Ulster, which is one-third Roman Catholic, 50 per cent of Roman Catholics preferred a power-sharing government from Stormont and only 14 per cent integration into a United Ireland (1984, 130). The data is not broken down by class or political party preferences. Also, it has often been suspected that the more one goes to the North-East, the greater the cultural integration and similarity between Protestant and Catholic — religious culture apart. However, this type of finding will diminish the more one approaches Derry or Belfast.

Hickey's argument provides food for thought. But one doubts if Roman Catholics of the North East would have very strong opposition to some form of federal Ireland, whereas the same could not be said of Northern Protestants. This part of the argument then weakens, but not the remainder: a great advance by Hickey is the recognition of the import of the general world-view structures of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, even though it is Catholic political theology rather than Protestant which he chastises, with the "Protestant state for a Protestant people" being viewed as a protective measure (Hickey, 1984, 122-126).

There is wider support for this theory, even though Hickey does not appeal to it, partly because he may not be aware of how strong his argument actually is. For Hickey other countries of the West found a *"modus vivendi"* in years gone by to cope with Protestant-Catholic political opposition, whereas Northern Ireland did not for the reasons Hickey gives. However, such a *modus vivendi* has not really been the case. It is clear from Martin's (1978) work that the historical problem was *solved* in these other countries rather than shelved or "managed". This was because either Protestants remained in a majority and therefore did not have to fear the monolith of Catholicism, or because Roman Catholics were in a majority and either Protestant rights of conscience were ignored or Protestants themselves were eliminated from the body politic. In addition, it should be noted that in Holland, where a 60:40 split between Calvinists and Roman Catholics, respectively, occurred, social order could only be established by *pillarisation*: the construction of an entire set of social

institutions for each religious grouping in the fields of welfare, hospitals, schools, political parties, radio and TV channels and the press (it should also be noted that "apartheid" has links with this type of polity).

Martin's work allows us to say that there is a long-standing political tendency going back to the breakdown of medieval Europe for Roman Catholicism to *monopolise* control of the dominant culture of "society". In this development, little attention was paid by the Church to the economic structure, its accompanying values and the mode of political power — aristocratic, oligarchic, democratic, even fascist — so long as it did not involve the denial of the "spiritual" and the Church's legimimate control of this sphere. It was this view of its cultural role which gave rise to the Roman Catholic Church's traditional stance against communism and to the political development of anti-clerical politics *only* in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Catholic countries, from Latin America to Russia. Hence, moves in Ireland towards an expansion of its cultural impact in the Irish Republic so as to become all-embracing, with space provided for nationalist ideology, is really only the expression of this wider tendency. In fact it had already been pointed out by Gramsci in the 1930s when he noted the way in which, with the downfall of the Papal States and the failure of abstentionist politics in Italy, the Papacy and the new religious orders had begun to develop "cultural catholicism" (the control of schools, media etc.) in order to ensure an overarching cultural unity imbued by Catholicism whatever the type of political leadership in the state (Gramsci, 1971; cf. Fulton, 1987b). Only in the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) did this ideology come to be questioned within the Church. Even so, it still remains the dominant Catholic political form in countries where they constitute an overwhelming majority (and there is nowhere where they constitute a small majority precisely because of the monopoly tendency). From this point of view, Ireland becomes unique. For, as a small island, it has a 20 per cent Protestant minority. In this perspective the Protestant loyalists of Ulster are right and not wrong about the Catholic monolith, and the Catholic structuring of the Southern state culture. The criminalising of divorce and the Catholic articles of the 1937 Constitution are outstanding examples (cf. Whyte, 1980; Inglis, 1987). The pursuit of Catholic monopoly politics in the Republic is probably not done in any explicit way. The Roman Catholic bishops have recently justified their support of the "Catholic" Constitutional articles, limitations on birth control and successful opposition to the introduction of divorce on the basis of a theory of "the common good": that some legislative measures permitting the violation of "the natural law" — and enabling divorce would be one of these, to the bishops' minds — would so weaken public morality as to harm guilty and innocent alike and lesion the good society (cf. Fulton, 1987a, 224-263). This theory of public morality thus *mediates* Roman Catholic monopoly politics into state law

and conceals to a degree, particularly for its supporters, its religious origins.

In a small island which constituted an integral political part of the United Kingdom for 122 years, and where the Catholic-nationalist population stretches throughout, it does seem somewhat strange to exclude the bulk of it from playing an integral part in the structuring of "the Troubles". While not providing the immediate reason for acts of violence in Ulster, there can be little doubt that the existence of a Catholic-nationalist "ethnic group" or "historical bloc" (a concept developed by Gramsci) is one of the constituent elements of a *structure* of violence. Gramsci's theory of the possibility of the primacy of the bloc over the state in the structuring of social order, rather than Althusser's assertion of the primacy of the state, seems to be borne out by this observation (the interpretation of Gramsci by Portelli, 1972, is followed in this context). A relevativisation of state structures — an acceptance of an even more fundamental level of social control and solidarity without denying the specificity of power and ideology of the state — clarifies the issues at this point.

Viewed from a Gramscian perspective, Roman Catholicism can be seen as part of the hegemonic culture of the Irish Republic and of the Northern Catholic-nationalist remnant, along with republicanism, nationalism and welfare capitalism. Within the world-view of the popular Catholic religion of the majority in both the South and the North, the clergy are viewed as having a legitimate role in public life and are seen to speak with an authority on certain issues, particularly those concerned with family, sexual morality, education and, importantly for this particular matter, with public morality also (see Eipper, 1985). Within this Gramscian framework, religion is seen as a principal component in the solidification of the hegemony of the Catholic-nationalist historical bloc, and it is in this role that it plays a part in the perpetuation of the *structure of division* from which violence and "the Troubles" spring.

There then remains the issue up to what point the Protestant loyalists and their religious beliefs are similarly involved. Clear recognition of a Protestant political religion has been shown by Wright. Aspects of his thought have been developed for Ulster unionism by Todd (1987) and for Protestant loyalists and Catholic nationalists in opposition by Fulton (1986, partly replicated in 1987a). Two historical accounts relating to Protestant loyalism and representing opposite judgments are those of Brooke (1987) and Miller (1978). In his historical sociology of Ulster Presbyterianism, Brooke refers to the Ulster Presbyterian Church of the eighteenth century as a type of "nation within a nation", a political unit which looked after its membership with care but also with discipline. This form of political Presbyterianism is often known as Arminianism, after the Dutchman who espoused as one of his views the importance of a link between church and state. Its power probably began to

decline with the emergence of Orangeism in the face of radical Catholic and "Enlightened" Presbyterian politics and the rise of the United Irishmen in the 1890s. However, Brooke ascribes the principal role in the change not so much to the collapse of Presbyterian polity as to the series of Protestant revivals in the first half of the nineteenth century, which drew together Presbyterians as a whole and most Church of Ireland leaders, clerical and lay. Though the Church of Ireland was Anglican, it was much more Calvinist in orientation than in Britain, and specifically more evangelical. This evangelicalism also had a specifically anti-Roman and proselytizing thrust, which Brooke tends to play down. In any event, as the power of the Roman Catholic majority in Ireland grew, so too did the necessity for Presbyterian and Anglican to work together in the political-religious sphere. The result for Brooke was the widening of Presbyterian political commitment from a citizenry inspired by Presbyterian principles to one with evangelical-Protestant principles. When the danger of home rule emerged in the 1880s, also against the backdrop of continuing gains in terms of education by the Roman Catholic Church leadership, Presbyterians began to move *en masse* in the direction of toryism and eventually into unionism. At the crucial juncture of the Reform Bill of 1884 and the home rule movement, party politics between Britain and Ireland radically broke, and Protestant loyalists had to develop their own independent organisation. Education became a political religious question, with Protestants in Ulster siding with religious education in schools — "Protestant" or "Bible-based" religious education for a Protestant population. Brooke recognises that part of this development was in response to similar increases in power by the Roman Catholic Church. This indicates the extent to which institutionalisations on the one side have been in direct response to those on the other. Brooke acknowledges that Ulster political Protestantism has strong evangelical and fundamentalist dimensions, but explains the continuation of the power of the hardliners in terms of the continuing Catholic-nationalist threat: a *religious* as well as a political threat. He thus places Paisley's power and position within this general Protestant tradition (as do Bruce, 1986, and Smyth, 1987).

Thus, Brooke feels justified in describing the Protestant loyalists as a national grouping, and argues that one element of that identity is a religious one. He finds no difficulty in accepting religion as one possible element in a national belief system, and in this is quite sociological to the point that one wonders why McAllister, Bew, Gibbon and Patterson have found it difficult to accept the same (cf. Kedourie, 1966; Smith, 1984). It also makes it so much easier to understand why Paisley can articulate so well the political-religious aspirations of something like half the Protestant-loyalist population.

But perhaps Brooke is too strong on his affirmation of Ulster Protestant nationalism. Clearly there is a religious world of meaning which half the Pro-

testant population of Northern Ireland inhabit. However, what precise political
significance this religious commitment has is only partially clarified. One
must also bear in mind Wallis and Bruce's reflections on the religious "apart-
ness" of the elect. But more important are the reflections made by a little-
read but important contribution to this aspect of the debate, Miller's (1978)
Queen's Rebels. The work is already referred to by Hickey in his attempt to
affirm the degree of separateness between the Protestant and Catholic political
traditions in Ireland. Miller refers to the "renewal of the Covenant" among
Protestant loyalists in 1971 in the face of the threat of a united Ireland and
abandonment by Westminster. This was the ceremonial signing by 334,000
men and women (roughly half the Protestant adult population) of a docu-
ment which replicated the sentiments of the Covenant renewal of 1912, when
the ranks of Ulster unionism were first effectively closed against home rule
and the signatories pledged themselves to defy the British government for as
long as was necessary to have their religious and civil rights respected. Of
course, the ceremony itself had a much greater religious significance for the
more evangelically and fundamentally inclined, especially those who nurtured
a long memory of Protestant Ulster heritage. The political-religious ceremony
of covenanting goes back to the experience of the Civil War in Scotland and
Ulster. Miller points out that Ulster Protestants have, since the first planta-
tions, banded together for self-protection and have never been simply a tool
of the British in Ireland. When the final confrontation between the Scottish
Estates and Charles I came over the imposition in 1636 of a new high-church
liturgy and church order on the Kirk, the Scots formulated their "Solemn
League and Covenant", in which they promised fidelity to the Crown but only
in return for their Presbyterian Church polity and worship. The signatories
were from both Scotland and from Ulster. It was the refusal of Charles to
accept such a covenant which led to the outbreak of the war in Scotland. But
despite Miller's attempt in the introduction to his book to draw attention to the
relevance of Covenant politics for contemporary events in Northern Ireland,
he tends later on to play it down as his historical analysis moves towards
contemporary history, swayed by a form of secularisation theory which he
takes on board when analysing nineteenth-century Ulster industrialisation.
But if one accepts Miller's first analysis of the events of 1971-72 and then
adds to it the reaction of the DUP leadership to the Anglo-Irish agreement
of December 1986, one finds that the sense of betrayal the leaders express
— that Margaret Thatcher is a "traitor" along with the British government as
a whole, just as Heath, Whitelaw and Faulkner and the British government
had "betrayed" Northern Ireland by the Sunningdale Agreement of 1972 (a
concept shared by the leadership of the Vanguard party, the DUP and the
Protestant paramilitaries of those years) — one suspects that the social sig-
nificance of this brand of Ulster loyalism is as great as ever it was. It is only

this "Covenant" political position, doctrinally religious for few Ulster evan-
gelicals, but of practical import at a more popular level, which can explain
why and how many Ulster loyalists can speak of the state as "traitor" to the
"people", and why the Ulster loyalists as a whole do not conceive of them-
selves as a "nation". Many appear to have mixed feelings on the issue while
quite a number would seem to be intrinsically anti-nationalist in stance. For
that is what Covenant politics implies: the relationship between people and
state is *contractual*, and the specificity of identity of this people is its 'Pro-
testant', religious nature. The other main strand in the ideology of Ulster
unionism (to be found still within the Official Unionist Party but also in the
Alliance) does not share the same perspective but identifies much more with
British nationalist beliefs. As both Wright and Todd have pointed out, there
is little directly "religious" in their views: though one should perhaps add
that at least some of them seem to have concepts of liberty and justice rooted
in Christian ecumenism and religious tolerance. There is, then, a dual focus
for identity as a Protestant loyalist. Todd (1987) in her otherwise well worked
and deeply perceptive article, confines the concept of loyalism to that of
loyalty to the Ulster Protestant people; but it does seem that many among the
British unionists have not been afraid to describe themselves in the same lan-
guage and that their "confusion" resides as much in the phenomenon of
loyalism as in their own state of mind. What Todd and Wallis, Bruce and
Taylor are opening our minds to is the likely decline of *British* loyalism and
that this could well be partnered by a growth in *Covenant* loyalism and an
even greater (fundamentalist) religious polarisation than we have known
hitherto; that the relatively uncommitted between the two polarised iden-
tities may be prepared to go along with Covenant politics if all else failed to
keep them out of a united Ireland. In such a situation, some kind of non-
nationalist, independent state could emerge, bearing some similarity to the
old Orange Free State in Southern Africa.

There is, then, a form of hegeomonic culture proper to a *Protestant-
loyalist bloc*. This culture is not without contradictions in its ideas but still
manages a united front against the greater danger in practice — so far, that is.
It has a strong religious component to it, both in terms of Protestantism and
in terms of anti-monopoly Catholicism. Buckley (1984) has shown just how
strong this religious component is within the framework of the structures of
everyday life, and how closely associated it is to the classical myths of Ulster
Protestant identity. It is this strength of popular culture in the North which
allows its Protestants to make up for the lack of legal reinforcement of reli-
gious norms, as exists in the Southern state. Evangelical Protestantism and
anti-Catholicism would probably strengthen rather than weaken if an indepen-
dent Ulster developed in the wake of a rapid British withdrawal. Thus, the
solidarity of the Protestant-loyalist bloc is in part due to religious factors; and

with no developed secular nationalist element of the Southern Irish type, this religious element is all the more to the fore. In this respect it becomes vitally important for the secular loyalist working classes, as Wallis, Bruce and Taylor have argued.

The role of Roman Catholicism in the Catholic-nationalist bloc is mainly in the construction of hegemonic solidarity, though it is also accompanied by the use of the force of law to compel dissent within the boundaries of the Catholic monopoly state. However, in the case of the Protestant-loyalist bloc, evangelical, particularly fundamentalist, Protestantism (and to a lesser extent the Orange Order as a political-religious organisation), while still playing a similar role to Roman Catholicism in the construction of hegemonic culture (though mainly through a populist culture rather than through law), additionally becomes the symbol of the existence of the bloc itself, worth fighting for, worth dying for, against the old enemy.

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