

Letter to Belfast Telegraph

Moving towards peace - 30th April, 1998

Sir,

The Referendum on the Northern Agreement faces us, North and South with a difficult choice.

For the first time in history the Agreement of 10 April 1998 holds out the possibility that Irish people North and South, Nationalist and Unionist, will be able to find an agreed way of living together. It offers a new definition of the nation, whereby any person born on the island can freely choose to belong to the nation.

In the South many find it painful to think of altering Articles Two and Three. This is partly because they represent an aspiration towards unity. Also, in the past, Southerners saw these Articles as being important to Northern Nationalists. Yet now, while many Northern Nationalists also find the prospect of change painful, both the SDLP and Sinn Fein representatives at the Talks have agreed to the change within the overall context of the Agreement and the new opportunities it offers. Further, the new Articles will retain the aspiration towards unity.

We need to ask, not only what pain this Agreement costs us, but also what pain it will cost others. For example, both Northern Nationalists and Unionists have committed themselves to transcend traditional enmities and work together in a new power-sharing Assembly. They are taking the risk of together writing a fresh chapter in the history of this island which we share.

If we say No to this Agreement it will not be implemented. But the onus will then be on us to state not only an alternative we want, but one which can win agreement among the different traditions on the island.

All of us desire to hand on to our children and grandchildren the bread of peace and hope rather than the stones of violence and hatred. We need to ask whether a Yes or No is more likely to win us the peace we so desperately need.

Is the time now? If not now, when?

Yours, etc,

Rev Tim Bartlett,

Rev John Brady, SJ,

Rev Lesley Carroll,

Rev Tim Kinahan,

Rev Brian Lennon, SJ

Rev Alan Martin,

Dr John D'Arcy May,

Rev Dr Johnston McMaster,

Rev Dr John Morrow,

Mrs Gina Menzies,

Br Peter O'Reilly,

Ms Janet Quilly,

Dr Geraldine Smyth, OP,

Dr David Stevens,

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