

Draft of report to the Presbytery of Monaghan

delivered by WJ McWilliam on Tues 2nd Dec 1958

As you are probably familiar with the extract from the replies to the questionnaire sent out to each congregation it is sufficient to say that the views expressed varied from the opinion that we should keep quiet, sit back and say nothing as no one will pay any attention and even if we do succeed in exerting an influence it would produce a violent and unpleasant reaction. The other view is that we should make whatever contribution we are in a position to make and to that end should take the fullest possible part in the public life of the country, in charitable organisations, local bodies and even by joining one of the political parties. For the first view, for which we are often criticised, events in the past have unfortunately provided a certain justification. Certainly in the early days of this State a considerable number of our people did help to the best of their ability and it was to a certain extent due to their efforts that the change over was carried out so effectively after the treaty. Unfortunately our advice and assistance not being fully understood came to be resented so that most now decline to express any opinion except in the most general terms, either from fear of offending or as has often happened provoking a bitter attack. In the result the benefit of the democratic traditions of the members of the Presbyterian Church, which in the past contributed much to this land and America, are in abeyance.

There is however also a danger to ourselves in this attitude of withdrawal recognised by those who feel that our people residing in the Republic should contribute to the best of their ability even if it does involve some risk. It is only through fuller appreciation of our duty to our neighbours with the expanding outlook which this implies that we will avoid the dangers inherent in the present purposeless outlook of many of our people. That as a result we would ultimately benefit ourselves is a truth recognised by at least one report.

At the same time if we are to avoid repeating past causes of misunderstanding those entering on public life should be satisfied that they have a definite contribution to make to the common good, and bearing in mind the cry of distress which prompted the saying "Hearing they hear not" avoid pressing purely political views which are at present unacceptable but at the same time be prepared to stand firmly on religious and moral convictions. Too many of our people have in the past given tacit consent to views with which they could not possibly agree.

That the task is bound to be difficult will be readily appreciated by those with experience on Church Committees who have had definite views on some particular subject. While everyone in the first instance warmly welcomed a minority view

if pressed can produce very vigorous opposition and unless supported by very definite convictions it is fatally easy to give up the struggle and become a mere yes man.

It is also doubtful if anyone can enter upon politics and make a contribution merely by the light of nature and I feel that those who are so inclined must join one of the political parties and so learn the job in the ordinary way.

To conclude I always remember a remark by a member of a golf club during a discussion on the merits or otherwise of some alterations and innovations by a new Secretary. This member who in his time had taken a very active part in the running of the club finished the discussion with the remark "It is a great deal better that he should do things even if some of them are wrong than that he should just do nothing". Accordingly I suggest that we should give the maximum of encouragement to those of our number who are prepared to take some part in the Public Life of the country even if we do not necessarily approve of their views.