**Christopher Hitchens**

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Outside the City Hall stands a monument to the Titanic, the building of which was the largest collective enterprise Ulster ever undertook; ‘It was in some ways a Protestant achievement, since the famous Harland and Wolff shipyard ran an open shop that excluded Catholic workers and since the owners reacted to the Irish Home Rule bill (of the same year as the ship’s launching) by threatening to move the yard back British mainland. As a consequence, the s of the .Church as the Antichrist. Both view their nearest neighbours with loathing and contempt: Bob Jones U. notoriously permits no interracial dating, and Paisley used to reprint the segregationist ravings of Governor Lester Maddox of Georgia in his Protestant Telegraph. Both were great friends, too, of the rebel leadership of white Rhodesia, which borrowed some of its own mutinous imagery from the UVF. For Paisley, then, the current negotiations among the British government, a section of the Unionist leadership and Sinn Fein is the ultimate betrayal.

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triumphalist, imperial and sectarian vessel has long been a

source of angst in the collective loyalist subconscious.

Another contemporary event was the raising, by the hellish

Sir Edward Carson and various disloyal officers, of tlie Ulster

Volunteer Force. Trained and drilled in defiance of an elected

Parliament, and supported by Tory extremists like Rudyard Kipling,

it committed the same offence for which the republican

martyr Sir Roger Casement was later hanged by smuggling its

illegal weapons in from Germany. Having helped to defeat Home

Rule, the U.V.F joked the colours en masse as the Ulster Regiment

on the outbreak of the First World War, and was d l a t -ed as cannon fodder in the early stages of the Battle of the Some.

The Protestant back-to-back proletarian streets around the shipyard were robbed of their menfolk, and to this day memorials to the Somme are the other distinctive feature in a landscape that is not exactly bereft of fierce commemorative SynbOlS and rituals. Today, in and around those same streets, the UVF. Slogan “For God and Ulster” can be seen, together with lurid Orange murals and defiant displays of sk+masked gunmen. Nowhere

else in the world, I think, does a majority population display so many of the symptoms of minority self-pity. (Though, with emigration and with the steeper rise in the man Catholic birthrate, the day is fast approaching when the ~ W Qpo pulations in Northern Ireland will achieve parity.)

The Rev. Ian Paisley is the rocklike symbol of this heritage

of paranoia and intransigence. From his “Free Presbyterian

pulpit on the Ravenhill Road come the authentic tones of the old

Covenant and the anti-Catholic martyrs of the Protestant Reformation.

Like Walter Scott’s ““Old Mortdity,” Paisley keeps the

graves and the memories fresh, and reiterates the trusty old slogans

of “Not an Inch” and ‘‘No Surrender.” I went to see him open a

new extension to his church, the “Paisley Jubilee Complex,”

which sounded a bit like a syndrome of some sort. He was to have

been aided in the ceremony by the Rev. Bob Jones, founder of

Bob Jones “University” in Greenvilla, South Carolina, but on

the day before the appointed service of dedication the Rev suffered

what Paisley stonily described as a “home-call” experience

from his maker. We had to put up with the grandson, Bob

the Fourth, instead.

If you can imagine the most primitive elements of thg Christian

Coalition blended and double-distilled, you have an Wing of

the nature of the Paisley-Jones alliance. Both regard the Roman

He is root-and-branch opposed to any consultation with the Republic

of Ireland government. Of an earlier Unionist leader who

paid a visit to Dublin, and who described the exercise as “bridge

building,” Paisley bellowed, “Bridges are like traitors. They go

over to the other side!”

This would be quixotic and bizarre, a part of the bestiary of

fundamentalist quackery, if one could forget that Paisley deposed

that Unionist leader and subsequently blocked all moves toward

power-sharing. The method was a simple one at first, and has

been omitted from most of the histories of the conflict, but a reborn

U.W. actually succeeded in letting off a great many bombs

in March and April of 1969 and having the explosions blamed

(by a not-quite-impartial police force) on the Republicans. Even

though the plot was eventually exposed and its leaders sent to jail,

it did inaugurate the present cGh~pth’a9s e. At the time, Paisley had

to be extremely nirnble about rem uninformed of the exact

movements of the enthusiasts in his congregation.

Nobody doubts that there is enough latent violence, and enough weaponry, among the loyalist rejectionists for at least one more wave of ‘No Surrender” terror. The death squads that once roamed Belfast k i h g Catholics at random are mostly stood down but by no means disbanded (witness the killings in response to the prison murder of loyalist leader Billy Wright). It’s hard not to feel something for the embittered poor whites of the Six Counties.

They gave their all for the Empire, they wave the Union Jack as if it were going out of style, they are fervent monarchists and they know, or at least suspect, that the rest of Britain is fed up with them. Unfortunately, this dim recognition ministers too well to the culture of stab-in-the-back and betrayal on which they have been raised. And, if counted as an irrelevance to the grand schemes of the “peace process,” they have ways of making themselves felt. The shipyards are almost idle now, and the memory of the Somme is an embarrassment to the British state, and the border between the two Hrelanh is an economic and political irrelevance. In some quarters you hear talk of a new partition of Ulster, to create a genuinely Protestants-only mini state. This would at least have the effect of recognizing the futility of the present one. Meanwhile, Paisley goes on preaching for another version of the Ulster “Great Revival” of 1859, when trances and fits and groaning overwhelmed whole communities of the faithful for days at a time, and one is left with the fear that if he really wants a “burned-over