

COMMEMORATION & CONTEMPLATION

[Unpublished letter to 'The Irish Times']

In the proposed FG-FF document for government, it is stated that a unit should be established in the Department of the Taoiseach to consider preparations for a united Ireland.

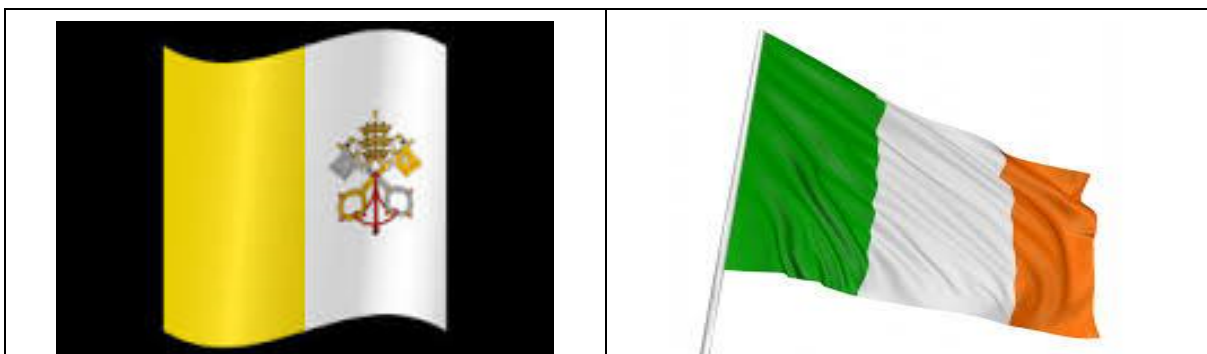
This foreshadows a complex process, but, were such a step to be taken under any Administration, it might begin with addressing a few simple issues.

For a start, one thinks of the recent commemoration of the 1916 Rising in the GPO where the Taoiseach, the Chief of Defence Forces and other dignitaries stood in front of a Roman Catholic priest leading the ceremony. Then there is the daily practice of the public national broadcasting service preceding the main evening news bulletin with a solemn bell-ringing inspired by the Roman Catholic and specifically Marian Angelus.

The very Constitution of our State has a Preamble which is not only definitively Christian but also Trinitarian, and therefore exclusive of Unitarian Protestants, no matter how small in number they may be; and that is apart from consideration of other religious non-Christian and non-religious citizens, of which there are ever-growing numbers in Ireland.

As a person of partially Unitarian background and currently a Humanist in philosophical position, as well as a committed nationalist and republican, I find these things insensitive and indeed offensive. I fully understand how unionists who are being wooed by some united Irelanders in the Irish Republic, with talk of inclusiveness, can thus regard the overtures in question as being hypocritical.

And the answer is not to be multi-denominational because, among other things, that is impractical, given the number of persuasions in the country. Rather should we accept that we are supposed to be living in a secular republic and that religious and philosophical stance should consequently be a matter for the private and not the public sphere, and certainly not portrayed as being necessarily characteristic of the State and all its citizens.



Daltún Ó Ceallaigh, 16 April 2020