



CNI

NEWS FOCUS - Easter Rising was “profoundly wrong” and undemocratic, NI Attorney General

The Easter Rising was “profoundly wrong” and cannot be justified as a “just war”, Northern Ireland’s first Roman Catholic Attorney General has said.

In a typically candid interview with a magazine examining multiple perspectives on the events of 1916, John Larkin said that the Dublin rebellion “lacked any democratic or constitutional legitimacy”, Sam McBride writes in the News Letter.

Some of the views expressed by the Executive’s chief legal adviser mirror those of senior Irish Catholic philosopher Fr Seamus Murphy who in December argued forcefully that the Rising “passes none of the ‘just war’ criteria ... it had a pagan love of war and blood-sacrifice”.

Mr Larkin made the comments in an interview with '1916-2016 The Rising & The Somme', a compilation of interviews edited by Peter Lynas, the Northern Ireland director of the Evangelical Alliance.

In his interview for the magazine, Mr Larkin recalled how as a teenager his attention was drawn to an article by Patrick Pearse, one of the leaders of the Rising, in which he said it was “a goodly thing to see arms in Irish hands. We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people, but bloodshed is a cleansing and a sanctifying thing”.

Mr Larkin said that his father had drawn his attention to the “genuinely horrific nature of such sentiments”.

The Attorney General said: “Looking at 1916, you have individuals of huge moral worth, individuals capable of huge self-sacrifice, doing something that was profoundly wrong.

“The Rising wasn’t justified in terms of any of the traditional Just War criteria – there was no mandate for it.

“One of the ironies of history is that it is often referred to as the Sinn Fein rebellion.

“It couldn’t have been a Sinn Fein rebellion – the official policy of the party up until 1917 wasn’t for a republic, but a monarchy on the Austro-Hungarian pattern.

“The 1916 Rising was a product of a secret revolutionary society, and an adventure that lacked any democratic or constitutional legitimacy.

“However, one much admires the courage and the self-sacrificing zeal for public welfare, though ill-judged, of many of those who took part in it.”

Mr Larkin also highlighted how many of those who ‘sacrificed’ their lives did not do so through their own choice, highlighting the children who died in 1916.

He argued: “Merely because one uses the language of sacrifice, or evokes a certain language that may resonate with Christian images and symbolism, doesn’t mean one is acting in a way that can be properly regarded as Christian.”

Mr Larkin said he believes that there is a segment of contemporary nationalism that is attempting to distance itself from the language of Pearse as it is “incapable of contemporary justification”.

And Mr Larkin – himself a devout Catholic – suggested that there was now a growing tension between Catholicism and Irishness as the Christian has yielded to the secular.

He said that “the qualifying adjective in the expression ‘Irish Catholic’ has become more important than the noun”.

Mr Larkin also commented on the search for the truth of what happened during the Troubles.

The Attorney General, who has controversially suggested an amnesty for all Troubles crimes, said: “The most noble service law and lawyers can offer to society is to know when, where, and to what extent to withdraw from the field and leave it to others.

“If one wants to find out ‘the way it really was’, you need to ask the historians rather than the courts.”

Mr Larkin said he believes that “reconciliation is virtually impossible, save in theological terms. I don’t think reconciliation is possible unless the divine command to forgive is acknowledged.”

The magazine also features an interview with Arlene Foster in which she said that “for those of us living in Northern Ireland, the Easter Rising

was used in a very negative way to justify a campaign of terrorism against fellow Irish people, frankly.

“It’s obviously for me a very negative event and something that was unjustified and something that was a very violent attack.”

The First Minister said that she was reminded at a recent Church of Ireland event in Dublin “how ordinary people were caught up in extraordinary events and that’s what happens often when violence takes over”.

Though Mrs Foster said that she was happy to mark the Rising as an historical event, she defended her decision not to commemorate a rebellion which she described as “unjustifiable”.

“Commemoration is a completely different issue because then you are giving some legitimacy to what happened at that time and for those of us who lived in Northern Ireland during the 70s, 80s and 90s it certainly is not something that I would be able to do.”

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