

When Peace Comes to Ireland

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Robert C Boraker

Do the latest proposals for a united Ireland offer any hope for peace in Ulster? How will the violence end?

OF COURSE I want a united Ireland," said the young teacher in Londonderry. "But not with that lot down South," she added with scorn.

That expresses one of the tragedies in Northern Ireland today.

Most southern Irish dream of a united Ireland while those in the North are bitterly divided over any effort in that direction. Ireland's divergent groups say they want peace and unity — but on their own terms.

It is sad to see this beautiful country ravaged by sectarian divisions and violence. The few tourists who go to Ireland today find the countryside — both North and South — to be a green and pleasant land. That's what President Ronald Reagan discovered when he visited Ashford Castle near Galway last June.

On my most recent visit to Belfast, I observed that outwardly, living conditions were fairly normal — except for the body searches at security checkpoints and the occasional army vehicle. One would hardly know this was the city plagued by violence for more than 15 years.

But under a surface that appears to be normal, sectarian troubles in Northern Ireland have utterly altered the lives of both Catholics and Protestants. Many families have been torn apart by two decades of violence.

Henry Sergeant, for example, begins his day at his home in the Andersonstown area of Belfast by switching on the radio to hear the latest news about bombings, hijackings and barricaded roads. The family can then plan their routes to work, school or the shops.

Mr. Sergeant tries to keep his five sons and five daughters close to home. "If one goes out, we always know where," he says. "And they call us to let us know they have arrived safely. If there's trouble, we go to get them."

The constant threat of violence takes its toll by building up stress on the mind and body. Some resort to alcohol or other drugs to cope. The consumption of tranquilizers in Northern Ireland tripled over the last 10 years. During 1983 alone, doctors wrote nearly 750,000 prescriptions for drugs. That was 20 percent more than in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Will this suffering end? Politicians only search for a solution.

Last May the leaders of rival nationalist parties in the Republic of Ireland met at Dublin Castle to approve the New Ireland Forum Report. The 14,000 — word report analyzed the island's social, economic and political problems. It also offered solutions.

It said, in brief, a unified Ireland would be the "most durable basis for peace and stability." As an alternative, it suggested that Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic could become separate states under a central government. Or Dublin and London could share responsibility for governing the North.

As usual, Ulster's unionists rejected the call for a united Ireland. They have been adamantly opposed to this concept. Protestant M.P. Ian Paisley's supporters plastered "Ulster Is British" signs on Dublin's central post office. That was where the uprising against the British began in 1916.

This message from Northern Ireland was clear. There would be no surrender to any effort that leads to British withdrawal so a united Ireland could be established. Compromise would be equally rejected by most other Ulster Protestants. Northern Ireland Secretary James Prior, from England, also says there were no grounds to expect agreement for any of the three constitutional solutions suggested by the Forum's report.

After interviewing people from both the North and South, one is forced to conclude that

the Irish problem is impossible for man to solve — so long as humans defy that great spiritual law, "You shall love your; neighbor [whether Catholic or Protestant] as yourself."

Attitudes of Fear and Hatred

In Galway, one young married man expressed to me the attitude of his Catholic father in these words: "The English have always ruled Ireland with a strong hand, denying us our rights and trying to take our religion away. They sent over the army to murder and kill. They took our land away and gave it to landlords who were Protestant settlers from England.

"If the Irish couldn't pay their rent, they starved to death. The Protestant majority in the North did not give fair play to the Catholic minority. This created the civil rights' movements. This then developed and moved into violence and murder."

Ulstermen, in turn, have had a siege mentality since the 17th century. They fear losing their civil and religious liberty won by the Protestant Reformation.

In the past, Protestants felt compelled to safeguard their freedom by discriminating against Catholics. Admittedly, Catholics have been treated better in recent years by being given improved housing and more jobs. But Ulster Protestants still have a fear of being outnumbered by Catholics, affecting their jobs, their government and their religion. And especially a fear of a repetition of the A.D. 1641 massacres, which they also remind themselves of every July 12.

There would be three million Catholics to only one million Protestants if Ireland were to be reunited as 32 counties. Instead of being a powerful majority, Ulster Protestants would then be in the minority — outvoted and dominated by Catholic politics. That's why they resist any forced reunion of the two Irish territories.

Many Ulster-Scot Protestants also fear the international political power of the Roman Catholic Church. They detest becoming part of what they regard as a rigid Catholic state. Under such a Catholic government, large numbers of Ulster Protestants fear it would no longer be easy for them to divorce or practice birth control.

How Irish Strife Began

Protestants and Catholics in Ireland have distrusted each other for centuries. "The Irish have long memories," one man told me.

To understand why there is strife in Ulster today, we must understand Irish history. Ireland has a complex history that involves cultural, ethnic, economic, political, temperamental and social differences.

It's a history filled with conflict between the native Irish and the foreign colonizers — whether they were Danes, Normans, English or Scots. The Irish also fought among themselves. There were feuds between families, battles between tribes and wars between provinces.

In the 12th century, Pope Adrian appealed to England's King Henry II (1154-89) for help in reforming Ireland by establishing full Papal authority. Pope Adrian's document said: "You shall enter that island and execute whatever may tend to the honour of God and the welfare of the land; and also that the people of that land shall receive you with honour and revere you as their lord..." (text of *Laudabiliter* in *Irish Historical Documents*, edited by Curtis and McDowell, pages 17, 18).

But England did not fully conquer Ireland until the time of Elizabeth I.

Meanwhile, Ireland, in the reign of Edward II (1307-27), was divided between Irish and English who had different languages, habits and laws. Their deep animosity toward each other was evident long before Protestantism. The English and Irish systems of land tenure, property and inheritance increased resentment and bitterness between the two factions. Religious conflict developed only later.

The Ulster Plantations

England's first Protestant king, Henry VIII, abolished papal authority in Ireland by declaring himself the head of the Irish church. But the Catholic friars were beyond Henry's power. They continued to preach everywhere among the people. Toward the end of Henry's reign, the Jesuits came to Ireland under the protection of Con O'Neill, "prince of the Irish of Ulster." Because they helped keep Roman Catholic traditions alive, most of Ireland remained faithful to Rome.

In 1541, the English Parliament declared Henry VIII "King of this land of Ireland, annexed and knit forever to the imperial crown of the realm of England." This paved the way for the effective conquest of Ireland by Queen Elizabeth I.

Ulster demanded the immediate attention of Queen Elizabeth. It was here that the Catholic Earl of Tyrone led the last pocket of Gaelic Irish resistance against English conquest and colonization. His army was defeated at Kinsdale in 1601. His lands — comprising six of the nine counties of Ulster — were planted or settled with Scottish Protestants.

Under James I, massive tracts of land were seized from the natives and granted to Scottish and English colonizers. By 1640, Protestants owned three million out of 3.5 million acres.

These "Ulster Plantations" divided Ireland into two antagonistic communities. The conquered and impoverished Catholic natives remained side by side with the Protestant settlers. When Sir George Carew reported on the plantations in 1611, he clearly foresaw that the Irish would rebel again.

The Scots who settled in Ulster were considered by the native Irish as being proud and haughty aliens. To the Scots, the Irish were backward in manners and customs. Thus the scorn of the Scot was met by the curse of the Celt — "the wild Irish" as they appeared to the eyes of the Scots.

In parts of Ireland, English colonists became absorbed by the native population. But in Ulster, Presbyterian Scots didn't generally intermarry with the devoutly Catholic native Irish.

Irish Catholics resented being ruled by persons of a different ethnic background and a different religion. To them, it was Protestant monarchs in England who had exploited and oppressed them. They felt discriminated against in respect to land tenure, housing, employment and political opportunity. This discrimination led to the uprisings in 1641, 1798 and, most recently, 1969.

Ulster Presbyterians such as Henry Cooke, Thomas Drew and Hugh Hanna became involved in politics as early as 1820. Politics and religion became mingled together, remaining so to this day.

Why No Peace?

Why is there no peace in Northern Ireland today? The ethnic, religious and political differences are contributing factors. But the Bible reveals a more important reason.

When God chose ancient Israel to be his nation, he revealed a code of law as a basis for their way of life (Deut. 32:45-47). This special knowledge would make them a wise and understanding nation. So much so that other nations would marvel and say: "'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ...And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:6, 8, Revised Authorized Version throughout).

The many blessings ancient Israel would receive for obeying God's commandments are enumerated in Leviticus 26. Notice one blessing in verse 6, "I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid."

But should the nation transgress God's law by going the way of selfishness, jealousy and greed, God said curses would come as a penalty: "Cursed shall you be in the city, and

cursed shall you be in the country" (Deut. 28:16).

That is happening in Northern Ireland today. People live in fear. The nation is under a curse for violating the great spiritual law God set in motion at creation — to love your neighbor as yourself.

How can peace and stability be restored to this cursed land? There is a cause for every effect. The curse of discord is the direct result of violating the spiritual law that regulates human relationships and governs human conduct. This divinely revealed spiritual law shows how to live at peace with one's neighbor.

The apostle Paul's words describe those who have brought a curse on Ireland: "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known" (Rom. 3:14-17, emphasis ours).

The Way of Peace

The way of peace is revealed by God's law. "Great peace have those who love Your law," David prayed (Ps. 119:165). Not only did he love and respect God's law, as the king with sovereign authority David enforced it in ancient Israel.

To have peace in any nation, there must be a constituted authority to administer the law fairly and equally, state the punishment and then see that all lawbreakers are punished justly, swiftly and consistently.

When the law is not enforced, crime and violence increase. The painful result is anarchy and gun law. That has happened in Northern Ireland.

Irish history for a thousand years is filled with accounts of abuse of authority and rebellion against constituted authority, whether it was exercised by the Danish, English or Scottish lords. One man summed up the situation in a nutshell when he said: "Under our system, you can govern people only to the extent that they wish to be governed. And by now, big numbers in the North, on both sides, do not wish to be governed."

The Bible commands both sides, "Pursue peace with all men," and "Be at peace among yourselves" (Heb. 12:14 and I Thess. 5:13). Political bombings to force a million Protestants into a united Ireland is not the way to peace. Neither is organizing Protestant murder-gangs to fight Catholic murder-gangs. That's the way to sectarian civil war.

Cooperation — rather than divisive antagonistic action — leads to social stability. But North and South have not yet been able to work together on some of the most essential matters of common interest. They have not known how to begin a mutual campaign to stamp out terrorism perpetrated by either the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) or the Provisional Irish Republic Army (IRA).

The IRA's Plan

Whether all Irish Americans believe it or not, it is documented that the IRA is part of the international network guided and exploited by the Soviet intelligence agency, the KGB. Both Palestinians and Cubans have trained IRA members in guerrilla tactics.

The IRA has a plan. It will continue to carry out bombings, shootings and other terrorism until the British withdraw because of frustration with the futility of it all. The IRA believes that its tenacity will eventually payoff.

But what does the IRA have in mind for a free and united Ireland if it ever succeeds? After talking to leaders of the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army in 1981, Otto von Habsburg became convinced they are intent on overthrowing the Dublin government and replacing it with a Marxist people's republic (*The Guardian*, July 10, 1981). Some IRA leaders talk of a socialist state that will redistribute Ireland's resources.

The power of the IRA can only be curbed when the South and the North become united in their efforts to stamp it out. Irish Americans can also help. When Irish Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald went to the United States in March of this year, he said they could help the Irish

cause best by refusing to contribute to "charities" that are known to finance IRA activities. He is determined to thwart the IRA's objectives to establish a military dictatorship on the island.

Protestant paramilitary organizations in turn respond to IRA terrorists by causing more loss of life, injury and damage to property. The actions of both extremist groups succeed only in sowing fear, division and distrust throughout the whole community.

What will happen "at the end of the day," as the Irish say? Both Catholics and Protestants agree that a military solution won't work. A political solution has yet to be found that will satisfy everyone.

Then what about a religious solution? Since there is a religious conflict, the only possible way to an enduring peace must involve religion. Are all parties willing to look to the law of God for a spiritual solution to their own attitudes and their mutual problems?

Prince of Peace

The founder of true Christianity came to "guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79). What then did Jesus Christ, as the Prince of Peace, say about the way that brings peace?

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). A real Christian man will work to bring about peace in his family and set an example in his community. He will not support and follow leaders and organizations that stir up strife, bitterness and hatred of any form.

When Catholics and Protestants battle it out with stones, firebombs, fists and even guns, can they do it "in Jesus' name"? A proverb for the wise says, "It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel" (Prov. 20:3).

A true Christian will heed the words of Christ: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). Hatred cannot be in the heart of one who obeys Christ's words. True love is outgoing concern to others. It is a sharing, helping and giving type of attitude.

True Christianity is a way of life based on helpfulness, toleration and respect for other people and their property. Too many in Northern Ireland are involved in a way of life that includes prejudice, hatred, discrimination, resentment and, in some cases, outright murder.

There is too much hatred and not enough love in Northern Ireland. Young children can sometimes be seen with faces contorted by angry rage as they shout vile curses at British soldiers or those who have a different religion.

Sectarian hatred and prejudice are learned at home and nourished in the community. The attitudes of parents are passed onto their children. Irrational violence can also be traced to the home where children too often are conditioned to brutality.

To solve this problem will require changes in child training. Parents should first set a good example by rooting religious prejudice out of their own attitudes. They should not allow their children to chant rhymes of sectarian hatred or take part in mob action on the streets.

The educational system also needs to be transformed. Divisions start in elementary schools that are either Catholic or Protestant. Catholics go to segregated schools and grow up without speaking to Protestants until late in their teens.

(To overcome those barriers, Belfast's Lagan College opened up its doors three years ago to both Catholic and Protestant youngsters. See the accompanying interview about this integrated school system.)

Discrimination in employment is still a problem in Northern Ireland. Protestant-owned firms employ mainly Protestants. Catholic firms do the same. Employers don't want to upset their employees by hiring someone of a different religion. They have yet to acquire the courage to be impartial in whom they hire rather than practice sectarian discrimination.

These changes are imperative before any peaceful solution can be implemented. Most important of all, what's needed is a change in the human heart and attitude.

When the Dream Becomes Possible

Will Ireland be united in the foreseeable future? The chasms that divide the island are so deep and wide, it could take years before there is any hope of reconciliation. The dream of a peaceful unification must be seen as impossible so long as both the Irish and Ulstermen have their human nature dominated by sectarian hatred, hostility, mistrust and anger.

Reunification is not a magic cure — all that will automatically bring peace. The problem is how to share an island in conditions of peace and reasonable fairness — how people of different ethnic origins, religions and political views can live together with toleration toward one another.

No peaceful solution appears to be on the horizon because the way to peace is not practiced. Yet there will come a peaceful world of tomorrow, the time when the government of God will be enforced by the returned Jesus Christ who will bring peace. You can read of this wonderful day for Ireland and for the whole world in our free booklet [The Wonderful World Tomorrow — What It Will Be Like](#).

The Irish dream of the day when ancient and horrible hatreds will be forgotten. They dream of the time when their country can live in unity and peace — living secure lives in happiness. The prophet Isaiah said that dream will come true when Messiah is King:

"Behold, a king will reign in righteousness.... Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" ([Isa. 32:1, 16-18](#)).

That truly will be the day "when Irish eyes are smiling... when Irish hearts are happy."