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Eóin de Bháldraithe

The Catholic
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As we prepare for the next papal visit in two years' time, it would be well to ask how much did we learn from the last one. The answer would have to be, 'Very little'.

Just a month before St John Paul came in 1979,

'eighteen soldiers are killed in an IRA bomb blast at Narrow Water near Warrenpoint, Co. Down. A 500 lb bomb planted in a lorry loaded with hay is detonated by the IRA as an army convoy drives past, killing six members of the Parachute Regiment. A second explosion in the same area damages a helicopter carrying members of a 'quick reaction force' from the Queen's Own Highlanders, killing twelve soldiers including the commanding officer.'¹

Archbishop Ryan of Dublin issued a statement referring to the 'killing', rather than the 'murder'. 'You see', said one senior Dublin priest to me, 'Ryan didn't come down in the last shower'.

At Drogheda, the Pope said: the situation here is unjust, but violence is not the way to resolve it. We need to get back to the teaching of Jesus. Violence is the way of hatred and fratricide. Peace is the way to justice. He quoted several times the words of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew: 'All who take the sword, fall by the sword.' To the young people in Galway he proposed the 'particularly difficult' phrase: 'love your enemies'. These are not just his words but the very word of God. To this they were specially bound *as Catholics*. Those words take away hatred; young souls are caught up in this hatred and 'we cannot either counsel or assist them'. A constant theme of his was that murder is murder. We should not call it by any other name. He is convinced that the Irish were consumed by hatred. Our attitude 'bears the mark of destruction

1 Quoted from P. Bew and G. Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-99* (Dublin 1999) 135-36

Eóin de Bháldraithe is a Cistercian priest at Cistercian Monastery, Moone, Co. Kildare.

and the brand of Cain'. He called on the (Catholic) men of violence to renounce their campaign. He did not say that they were justified in any way. Rather, return to Christ and he will forgive you.²

It is easy to compare the official approach in Ireland as Bishop (later Cardinal) Cahal Daly, the principal spokesman, had published two volumes of his speeches on the troubles.³ His first outing was at the reburial of Roger Casement (1965). He claimed that the IRA violence of 1916 was 'just and necessary' but that of the current IRA was not. He even goes so far as to say that 'the heroism of both soldiers and civilians in that (1916) struggle wrote a glorious chapter in our history.' He kept up this theme for the next twenty years or so. Perhaps he endorsed 1916 too unthinkingly, not realising what he was letting himself in for.

Enda McDonagh says, 'The official and probably majority attitude in Church and state in the Republic of Ireland today is that 1916 and the subsequent war of independence was a good thing and effective but that the campaign of the new IRA cannot justly claim to be in that tradition and is doomed to be ineffective.'⁴ He goes on to show that it is nearly impossible to defend this view, but Daly hammered away defending it.

The bishop also allowed the view to circulate that he had written the Drogheda speech for the Pope. Certain parts of it are indeed in his style. Peace, he says, is the work of justice but he never says with the Pope that violence is the way of hatred. How could he, if 1916 was so noble? Among his more unfortunate contributions to this speech was the statement that the troubles were 'not a religious war'. Yet his predecessor, Cardinal Conway, was wont to say that they were not *primarily* religious. Even if they were only one percent religious, the churches were responsible for that much but Daly absolves himself completely. The sword-word is foreign to his vocabulary. The Pope's passionate words: violence is 'evil, a lie, it destroys what it claims to defend, it is a crime against our faith and humanity', are miles apart from those of Daly.

As Daly's thought deteriorated he eventually came to define murder as 'killing of the innocent' perhaps not realising that this allowed killing of the guilty.⁵ That was rather serious in a society where people take the law into their own hands. For example, the Kingsmills massacre (1976) was probably the most notorious sectarian killing of the whole campaign. There were some Catholics killed in the area a month previously, so 'republicans decided to

2 See my article: 'The Pope on Violence', *Doctrine and Life* 30 (1979) 634-55.

3 C.B. Daly, *Violence in Ireland and the Christian Conscience; Peace the Work of Justice* (Dublin 1973 & 1979).

4 E. McDonagh, *Gift and Call* (Dublin 1975) 150.

5 Daly, *Peace*, 84-85.

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respond with even more brutality.⁶ The IRA stopped a minibus and ordered the eleven Protestants to line up at the side. They called on the one Catholic present to 'walk down the road and not to look back'. They fired 136 shots at the Protestants aimed at the waist. The leader then gave orders to 'finish them off'. As one person went along shooting them in the head, he was deceived by Alan Black's bushy hair and the bullet just grazed his skull and so he survived to tell the tale.

On the previous day, five Catholics had been shot dead in the same area. A friend 'explained' to me that those ten were killed because it was certain that the group included four who were guilty of killing the Catholics. He was thus a faithful disciple of Daly.

We know now, however, that the killing of the Catholics had nothing to do with the massacre as the IRA had researched it most carefully for a long time. It is even known who led the murderers but he cannot be named yet for legal reasons. Their choice was particularly unfortunate as all the Protestants were from Bessbrook, a Quaker village, where the ideals of nonviolence and common ownership survive to a large extent.

After the visit Archbishop Ryan said that the papal teaching was nothing new; it was just the same as what the Irish bishops were saying all along. As we all do sometimes, he and Daly must have been hearing without listening!

Why it took another fifteen years for a ceasefire to emerge will be debated for the next thousand years and more. The clever response of the IRA is worth quoting:

'In all conscience we believe that force is by far the only means of removing the evil of the British presence in Ireland ... we know also that upon victory, the Church would have no difficulty in recognising us'.⁷ Who would dare say that they had this last thing wrong?

CHURCH TEACHING

Here I would like to offer a very brief history of Christian attitudes to violence. The Greek philosophers debated the matter but it is the ethics of Cicero that survived as the most authoritative. Jesus in his turn taught non-resistance, non-violence, what we call full pacifism.

The very early church law insisted that the homicidal violence of soldiers was incompatible with the Christian way of life. We know this from the Syrian and Ethiopic versions and the earliest

6 T. Harnden, *Bandit Country: The IRA & South Armagh* (London 1999) 133.

7 Bew and Gillespie, 137.

Roman version as far as we can reconstruct it.⁸ Roland Bainton in his history of Christian attitudes to war, shows how Augustine and especially Ambrose simply repeat the ideas of Cicero.⁹ The former insisted that one must love the enemy even while striking him down. He successfully urged Constantine to use the army to bring the Donatist heretics to heel and signalled other ‘just’ wars (about 410 AD).

When the Moslems rose some two hundred years later, they were at first regarded as heretics, that is, seriously in error but still Christian brothers and sisters.¹⁰ By the time of the first Crusade, the church had classified them as ‘infidels’ whom it was lawful to fight. The Pope himself was now allowed to initiate war and the main incentive he had to offer was the plenary indulgence which turned it into a penitential exercise. When the second Crusade was proclaimed, St Bernard made the theology more flexible. He dispensed people from Augustine’s love; rather should they say with the psalmist, ‘Lord, do I not hate those who hate you? I have hated them with a perfect hate’ (Psalm 139:21-22). It was not murder to kill a Muslim, it was the will of God. To die in battle was to go straight to heaven. He founded the Orders of Knights who believed passionately in this holy death. To our great surprise both Augustine and Bernard forbade killing in self defence as Jesus did to Peter.

After the Reformation, the church did not re-found the Orders of Knights and generally abandoned the theology of Crusades. One of the last was that of Gregory XIII to Ireland (1580). When a few decades later the church was trying to shed the crusading theology, the Jesuit Francisco Suarez was one of the main actors. It was still acceptable to attack heretics or non-Christians but he ruled out this option and, depending mainly on Cicero, laid down criteria for Christian princes attacking one another. This is still the bedrock of international law and the philosophical basis of the United Nations and its policy of self defence.¹¹

For Suarez pacifism was a heresy and so it remained till our own day. The credit for changing that goes to Thomas Merton and the influence of his Quaker mother. (Quakers of course are traditionally pacifist.) In 1983 the bishops of the USA wrote a pastoral, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and our Response*, which had

8 ‘The Church’s First Official Position – and its Withering Away’ in J-M. Hornus, *It is not Lawful for me to Fight: Early Christian Attitudes toward War, Violence, and the State* (Scottsdale PA: Herald 1980) 158-99.

9 RH Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (London 1961).

10 most notably St John of Damascus (Damascene); see S. Griffith, *The Church under the Shadow of the Mosque* (Oxford 2008).

11 During the conflict, Cardinal Basil Hume claimed that the Falklands were ‘ours’ and expelling the Argentinians was self defence.

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the effect of rendering the pacifist option acceptable inside the Catholic Church.

McDonagh says again, commenting on the theory that sometimes war is justified:

It may be that in special circumstances a holding operation is all that can be achieved and violence done to individuals or groups has to be forcibly restrained. Yet the individual Christian and the Christian community can only recognise this as a failure to release the divine saving gift.¹²

The last few words are his description of the Christian attitude. His ‘holding operation’ refers to the police function, sometimes called ‘an interim ethic’. John Howard Yoder belonging to the Mennonites, another pacifist church, explains very clearly the difference between the police function and the aggressive role.¹³ So there are three possibilities today: there is the just war; there is the view that this is only an interim ethic and there is the full Christian doctrine of non-resistance.

It is reported that the present Pope would wish to write an encyclical on this theme of non-violence taking up the words of John Paul, ‘Violence is a lie’.¹⁴ He could very well use his Irish mission to rehearse his theology on the matter. Certainly we need to hear those words again. John Paul returned to the theme again in Vienna 1983. He recalled the role of John Sobieski, his fellow countryman in raising the siege of Vienna. Yet there was no endorsement of the method. Rather,

We understand that *the language of arms is not the language of Jesus Christ* ... armed combat is, at best, an inevitable ill in which even Christians may be involved ... Christ turns every one of my enemies into a brother ... worthy of my love.

This is now official RC teaching, however much it is ignored. If the present Pope recalls us to that, it will be a great blessing.

IRISH CULTURAL ROOTS

Our attitude here is an inheritance from the European wars of religion; our thirty years of ‘troubles’ resembles the Thirty Years’ War

¹² Mc Donagh, *Gift* 166.

¹³ J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Michigan 1972). The Mennonite church founded in 1527, ten years after Luther posted his theses, espoused non-violence. The Catholic authorities usually executed them by drowning in Switzerland and buried them alive in the Netherlands. To learn more just google *Schleitheim*, their basic confession.

¹⁴ *The Tablet*, 23 April 2016, 12.

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in Germany with the same proportion of people killed. Especially interesting is the discovery of 'the same plenary indulgence and remission of sins that those receive who fight against the Turks' offered to the Irish by Pope Gregory XII for fighting the heretics.¹⁵ This is the distant justification for the violence in Co. Cork after 1921. All Protestants were regarded as legitimate targets, whether they were actually involved or not. See Peter Hart, especially the chapter on, 'Taking it out on the Protestants'.¹⁶ This is a clear survival of the crusading ideal. Republicans cleverly claim that there is no sectarian dimension to their campaign. But it is just a new name adopted after the French Revolution to cover the same reality. For example Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin prayed for the Stuart Pretender *a bhrúfas an bruscar sin Lúithear is Sheáin* (who will crush the rubbish [that is the followers] of Luther and Jean [Calvin].)

Irish Catholic culture is still deeply marked by sectarianism leading to a toleration or even consecration of violence. I offer two examples. John Blowick, the founder of the Society and the Sisters of St Columban wrote as follows:

I am strongly of the opinion that the Rising of 1916 helped our work indirectly. I know for a fact that many of the young people of the country had been aroused into a state of heroism by the Rising of 1916 and by the manner in which the leaders met their death. I can affirm this from personal experience. And, accordingly, when we put our appeal before the young people of the country, it fell on a soil which was better prepared to receive it than if there never had been an Easter Week.¹⁷

The missionaries brought with them the limitations of the time and especially the opposition to Protestants who were regarded as competitors. Training priests in Latin was a serious handicap. The treatment of female missionaries left much to be desired. Despite their best efforts, they were identified with the western powers and merited the hatred of the locals. They looked on other religions as devil worship and were unready for the Vatican Council teaching on 'what is true and holy in those religions'. The control exercised by Propaganda was a major obstacle to change. This paragraph

15 J. Liechty, C. Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Dublin 2001) 75.

16 P. Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies* (Oxford 1998)

17 quoted from Brendan Fahey, 'Mayo and China: John Blowick, Missionary Priest'. E. McDonagh (ed.) *Survival or Salvation? A Second Mayo Book of Theology* (Dublin 1994) 150-59

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summarises the views of Neil Collins, their official biographer.¹⁸ Páraic Ó Murchú gives a graphic account of the crisis caused by Vatican II among his theologically illiterate brethren.¹⁹

Another indication is the mosaic of Patrick Pearse in Galway Cathedral. This is how it is described in an anonymous article on the internet.

Pearse was an educationalist which might have rated him a mention here but the mosaic is clearly a product of his canonisation following the blood sacrifice of 1916. The close identity between Irish nationalism/republicanism and the Catholic church (*pace* the odd excommunication here and there), capped by the blood sacrifice, earned Pearse a place of honour in the church's iconography.²⁰

These two examples show how close Catholic culture is to violence. As John Paul said, 'it bears the brand of Cain' and we have exported it.

Who will deliver us from the body of this death?

It may be a surprise that I would suggest ex-Pope Benedict XVI, but we need somebody of his theological calibre as the apologists of Irish nationalism are competent and clever. He would go before the present Pope like John the Baptist; otherwise the papal words might wash over our heads as they did the last time.

Early in 2006 the British Parliament legislated that if there was no agreement between the parties in Northern Ireland by 26 March, then the province would come under direct London/Dublin government. A few days beforehand Pope Benedict joined the international chorus urging agreement. He said that it would be a 'powerful Christian witness'. Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams finally sat down opposite one another at a diagonal table on the appointed day. *The Irish Catholic* presented the event the following week with Paisley and Adams pictured together under a large-print caption, 'A powerful Christian witness'. The new Executive was duly formed and Paisley became First Minister with Martin Mc Guinness as Deputy. The old man treated his deputy as if he were his own son for the year of their joint reign. This cemented the agreement and prepared the way for the more frayed relationship with Peter Robinson that would follow. If one were to invite Ratzinger here he would at least be able to explain why this is such

18 *The Splendid Cause: The Missionary Society of St Columban 1916-54* (Dublin 2009) especially 289-300.

19 *Misean Mhá Nuat chun an tSine* 1916-63 (FÁS 2003).

20 accessed 15 November 2015. To grasp the full extent of Pearse's dedication to the blood sacrifice, see S. Murphy, 'Dark Liturgy, Bloody Praxis: the 1916 Rising', *Studies* 105 (2016) 12-23.

a strong Christian witness, a theme which will be new and very new to most of us.

On the first anniversary *The Irish Times* editorialised as follows: ‘A powerful Christian witness to the world. Christians working out their problems in a very reconciliatory way ... witness to on-going problems of the Balkans and Middle East, both of which have religious components.’ Presidents Clinton and Obama have consistently emphasised this dimension.

One could suggest that Benedict visit Corrymeela in north Antrim. This community was founded by Ray Davey, a Presbyterian minister, in 1965 before the ‘troubles’ began. John Coakley reminded us of ‘the frequently invisible, self-effacing and unassuming work of teams of external facilitators that eventually led to the “stunning” success of the present settlement’ (*The Irish Times*, 11 July 2007). Those teams frequently met in Corrymeela during the darkest days.

It may be possible also for him to pray at the site of the Kingsmills massacre and meet the surviving Protestant. The incident occasioned a cartoon in Germany of gunmen ordering Jesus out of a minibus and asking if he were Catholic or Protestant. That shows clearly how the war was interpreted as religious outside Ireland, despite the denials of Daly and John Paul. Papa Ratzinger may even remember the cartoon.

We could also show him the huge iron gate at the bottom of Shankill Road, the ‘Peaceline’ and bring him to see the enormously high divider beside St Matthew’s Church in The Short Strand. There he could add his Christian voice to that of Obama urging people to dismantle the walls.

This is not to say that Benedict’s teaching will please everybody. It is well known that he differed from John Paul’s more radical pacifism. For us here this is a small point. The new Executive has a longstanding problem of how to deal with ‘The Past’. We need to stop extolling and even consecrating the violence.²¹ We need to shed the relics of the crusading mentality. Benedict could add his weight to the words Queen Elizabeth spoke to us while she was in Dublin Castle, ‘We bow to the past but we are not bound by it’.

Joseph Liechty, an American Mennonite and Cecelia Clegg, a Catholic nun, were joint authors of *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*²² which reflected the work done by Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI). This in turn led the Loyalists to accept the new policy of co-operation with Catholics, the leading politician being the deeply regretted David Ervine. The second chapter

21 see G. Daly (ed.) *The Church and the Rising* (Dublin 2016) for a whole range of churchmen endorsing 1916.

22 note 15 above.

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outlines the history of sectarianism telling the story of both sides. Catholics need to acknowledge the hurt we have caused in the past such as in the 1641 rebellion. The Protestants may be in denial about the actions of Cromwell in 1649, but if we criticise that we are just entering into the powerful river of sectarianism. Protestants remember 1641 as the Catholics stabbing them in the back and Cromwell in 1649 has an eternal place in Catholic mythology.²³ Benedict could teach us that we need to forgive our enemies even when they crucify us. Those two authors warn us that any attempt to strengthen the boundaries between the two communities is a sectarian act and to this theologians and historians are especially prone. They conclude by insisting that ‘benign apartheid’ will never be enough in Northern Ireland; we need full reconciliation. Some input from Benedict on those lines would lead us on a long way from where we are.

23 *ibid.* 77.

Too close to death. This dislike of getting too close to death is reflected in the relatively low number of people who have made arrangements for what they would like to happen to them if they became terminally ill or died (Weafer 2014c). While just over half of Irish adults have seriously considered their views on organ donation and whether they would rather be buried or cremated, and around a third have drawn up a will, most Irish people have never seriously considered other important aspects of death, such as telling people where their important documents are, their views on life-prolonging treatment, what they would like at their funeral, their religious or cultural preferences, power of attorney, or advance care directives. In most cases, the proportion of people who had recorded instructions on these issues was typically less than 10%.

– JOHN A. WEAFFER, *Death and the Irish*, ed. Salvador Ryan (Dublin: Wordwell Ltd.) p.274.