

A Road Too Wide
The Price of Reconciliation in
Northern Ireland

by
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with Hilary Saunders
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Introduction

When I was studying for the Presbyterian ministry I could put my pen down and look out on the Woodstock Road, Belfast. Now in my present study I am still able to look out at the Woodstock Road, but today the city is Oxford. My family have been living here for six months and gone are the many tensions that made life difficult for us in Ulster.

Back home in Ireland some people have called me a heretic. Well, if Ulster's controversial orthodoxy is the standard I suppose the title was appropriate. I would have been ashamed not to have been called a heretic on those terms.

June and I harbour a dream that one day peace will come to Ulster. For this to happen Ulster Protestants will have to set aside their bigotry and IRA men will have to set aside their wilful bombings. It is sheer nonsense for Protestants to believe that God will put Roman Catholics in hell and that he brands their church Satanic and their Pope anti-Christ. There are many evangelical Christians in Ulster and they must raise their voice for reconciliation and not clamour for victory and hangings. It would be good to hear of Presbyterian ministers in rural non-Alliance districts taking a stand against bigotry instead of marching to Loyalist drums or at least viewing organisations of division with benevolent neutrality.

Again the dream of peace can only be achieved when the IRA give up their campaign of murder. Each day when I went into Magilligan prison I spoke to IRA prisoners in the corridors and wing canteens. Never once did they ridicule or mock my faith, but they knew what I felt about the killings, the victims and the orphans. Should any of the IRA men I know read this may I again appeal to you to stop the bomb-

ings. I am convinced that you will never unite a country by further dividing its people. There will only be two losers and no winner.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Hilary Saunders for the dedicated way in which she has gone about writing this book. I first came into contact with Hilary when she was working as personal assistant for David Watson, and we have enjoyed this opportunity of working together. Hilary's parents, Teddy and Margaret Saunders, have been so good to us in our move to Oxford, and I would also like to thank Teddy for his perceptive comments about the manuscript.

My sincere thanks go to my mother and brother, who mean so much to me, and to Noble Boggs and the loving caring Christians in Limavady. I have a great debt to Professors Russell and Barkley for the un-bigoted way in which they taught theology. I owe much to Ulster clergy like Ronnie Craig, Rex Rutherford and Canon Knowles who taught me so much. Both the Church of Ireland and Roman Catholic Bishops of Derry, Dr Mehaffey and Dr Daly have given me much help and understanding, and I will long treasure a message from the Roman Catholic Cardinal on my departure from Ireland. Ulster is famous for its medical practitioners and I am grateful to Drs Shahid, White, Mizra, Heaney, Rutherford and Millar for all their goodness to us. From the Ulster soccer fraternity I particularly want to thank Ronnie McFall, Johnstone Nelson and Terry Moore for bringing so much happiness to our family on Saturday afternoons.

So many people have welcomed us to Oxford, but in particular I would like to thank the Bishop, Patrick Rogers, Canon Michael Green and the staff of St Aldate's, and the Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Geoffrey Shaw, the staff and my fellow students. I wish that the average Ulsterman could hear some of the lectures given by my tutor, Dr McGrath, himself an Ulsterman, and a recognised authority on Martin Luther.

Father Kevin Mullan, the Roman Catholic priest from Limavady has been a gracious friend and I pray that this man

of God will have much influence in the land of Ireland in the future.

Most of all I want to thank my wife June, and our children Paul, Julie, Sarah Jane and Mark for all the love and support they have shown me. They have borne much of the hatred that resulted from having me as husband and father, and without their support my story might never have happened. They mean the world to me.

Please pray for us in Oxford that God will lead and guide us in the future. For my part, my prayer is that this book will disturb some of the apathy towards Ulster, causing many to rethink their attitudes towards those on the other side of the religious divide, and that most of all it will make you want to thank God, and give greater glory to him.

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