

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Interview with Rev. William Bingham on BBC Radio Ulster

Tuesday 17 June 1997

Interviewer: The Secretary of State is in Portadown for talks with Garvaghy residents. Earlier Dr Mowlam met Armagh Orangeman at Stormont, the County Grand Chaplin - the Rev. William Bingham told me it was a constructive, if inconclusive forty minutes.

Bingham: I suppose the only thing is that we are closer to the parade and to the service in July. Therefore, the urgency is there very much at this stage. We expressed our view that we were willing to accommodate the nationalist people, that we wanted and that we have taken on board their requests, we have taken on board some of the things that they have found objectionable within our parade. We were responding to the many letters that we had received and that we felt that we had a very good basis for agreement and that what we felt needed within the whole of the community was a new spirit of tolerance that both sides had been intolerant in the past throughout our community and we needed to have a fresh tolerance towards one another.

Interviewer: So how do you see the parade as it is planned at the moment for Garvaghy Road?

Bingham: Well I think it will be a parade which will, we have promised, will consist only of members of Portadown District. It will be a dignified parade for morning worship, there will be no kind of triumphalism whatsoever.

Interviewer: No bands?

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Bingham: The bands will play music that are traditional hymns to both traditions and we feel that in ten to fifteen minutes down the road that people should be able, if they don't like us, to at least tolerate our culture. We have been told that the nationalist folk want to create a new Ireland where people are respected and each cultures are respected. Now we are saying we have respected your views. We have taken them on board and now we are asking for your toleration and respect of ours.

Interviewer: But this is without discussion because the Orange Order's latest policy is that there will be no asking permission to march, you will encourage dialogue but you are not going to ask anyone's permission?

Bingham: I think there is a difference between asking peoples' permission and talking and listening to folk. For the last eight months, myself and the County Grand Master have been involved in talking to folk, senior politicians in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, we have spent time talking to nationalist folk who live on the Garvaghy Road, businessmen from Portadown and we have spent many hours talking to churchmen.

Interviewer: But not to the people in the Garvaghy Road who have become the spokespeople for those residents?

Bingham: We have been talking to folk on the Garvaghy Road who live on the road, we have listened and we have looked at the responses made to our letters and I would have to say this - that a substantial number of the letters that we have received actually are from folk who say we have no problem with your parade, there are others who have said we have had problems in the past with triumphalism if you could ensure that would not happen again, then we would have no problems and there are others who have said listen we just don't want you on the road. So we have taken on board, you know what we feel is broadly speaking, many of the feelings within the nationalist people on the Garvaghy Road.

Interviewer: But you still won't speak to people who you feel are manipulating the situation?

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Bingham: Well my problem is that as a County Grand Chaplin of the Orange Order, we have 6,000 members in County Armagh, 60 of our members have been murdered by republican terrorists and we have seen and we have believed the last sixteen months that it was the republican agenda to cause confrontation over the parades issue and the events yesterday in Lurgen just were a confirmation of that. What we are saying to our people is this that after yesterday, if never before, we need to create an environment where there will be consensus, where there can be stability, where there can be tolerance and we are saying to our folk very clearly that we must not play the Sinn Féin game and we must not get involved in confrontation with the security forces this summer. They have suffered so much through the years, the onus is on all of the community, Protestant and Roman Catholic to tolerate one another and not to put our police in the position where they are going to be in between.

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