

**NEWS
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CARDINAL O FIAICH SPEAKS ON THE
CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIANS
POSED BY THE NORTHERN CONFLICT

Text of address by CARDINAL TOMÁS Ó FIAICH at the annual Brudermahl (Fraternal Meal) at St. John's Monastery, Hamborn, in the diocese of Essen, West Germany. The Cardinal and Dr. John Thompson, former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, have been invited to speak at the function, which 300 will attend.

Jim Cantwell, Director

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FOR USE ON
14 SEP 1987
AT 1900 HOURS

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

I am very grateful for your kind invitation to my colleague and myself to say a few words to you this evening on the present situation in Northern Ireland.

When I was a young priest I didn't think I would live to see the day when a Presbyterian Minister and I would be preaching from the same pulpit. At that time the clergy of the different Churches in Ireland - and the situation was much the same in other countries - went their separate ways. When we happened to meet on the street or visiting a hospital, we exchanged a courteous greeting and then passed on. But we knew nothing about each other's theology or prayer life and rarely attended services in any church except our own.

I remember reading at that time an account of how a Protestant Pastor and a Roman Catholic priest who were attending an educational conference in a crowded hotel found themselves forced to share the same bedroom. As each knelt down beside his bed to say his night prayers, the Catholic priest thought to himself about the other: 'I wonder how much of the Bible he reads before retiring'. Every now and then he would glance around and when he saw the other still going strong he would get new fervour. And the Protestant Minister thought to himself: 'I suppose he says about ten Rosaries so I can't let down my own side'. Well they

kept watching each other for hours, neither of them willing to get into bed first. Inevitably, when morning came, they were both found asleep on the floor.

Yes, in those days we were very ignorant of each other's beliefs and practices. Thank God, many of the clergy in Ireland are now in frequent contact with their opposite numbers in other Churches. In fact ecumenical contacts between the clergy have never been so friendly or so frequent within living memory as they are now. Every month or two the leaders of the main Churches meet in each other's houses for prayer, Scripture reading and discussion of current events. We try to speak openly and honestly to each other. A few times every year we spend a day together visiting one of the cities or towns - hospitals, homes for handicapped children, for battered wives, for old people and so on. Sickness and old age do not respect denominational distinctions. It reminds me of Pope John XXIII's statement about his life as a Nuncio in the East: "We never had any disagreements when we dispensed charity and compassion together".

I don't intend to give you even a summary of Irish history tonight. Yet, a few words are necessary by way of background. Let's just note in passing, therefore, that a small minority of Irish nationalists, with some help from Germany, staged an uprising against British rule during the First World War and that the British withdrew in 1921 from twenty-six of the thirty-two counties, the area which is now the Republic of Ireland. The population of the Republic is over 90% Catholic. The remaining six counties which had a Protestant majority, mainly descendants of 17th century English and Scotch colonists, has continued since then as part of the United Kingdom. The population of Northern

Ireland is over 60% Protestant (of whom Presbyterians form the largest group) and nearly 40% Catholic. Most of the Protestants wish to maintain the union with Great Britain and are therefore called Unionists or Loyalists. Most of the Catholics consider themselves as Irish, not British, and are therefore called Nationalists.

Our problem is thus essentially a problem of two minorities. Catholics are a minority in Northern Ireland, Protestants are a minority in Ireland as a whole. The Catholics claim that for most of the period since 1921 when the majority Unionist party has always been in power, they have been discriminated against in the allocation of jobs and houses, in the recognition of their Irish identity and in the drawing up of electoral boundaries. Many Protestants of Northern Ireland claim that in a united Irish state in which they would be reduced to a minority they would suffer similar disabilities. To a typical Unionist any claim by the Republic of Ireland to intervene in Northern Ireland is regarded as "foreign interference in the internal affairs of the United Kingdom". To a typical Nationalist the presence of the British army and British governmental agencies in Northern Ireland is regarded as "foreign interference in the internal affairs of Ireland".

Since the 'troubles', as they are euphemistically called in Ireland, broke out nearly two decades ago, they have caused the deaths of 2,600 persons while 25,000 others have been injured. 50,000 people have been driven from their homes in what has been called the greatest forced movement of population in Europe since World War II.

In comparison with some of the other tragedies of this century, these figures may seem small at first sight. But remember, Northern Ireland is a very small area, with a population of only a million and a half. Violence at the same level in the Federal Republic of Germany would have led to the loss of nearly 90,000 lives and in Russia to the deaths of nearly 300,000. Add to that all the street rioting, intimidation, kidnapping, racketeering, the seizure of hostages, the burning of houses, even of churches and schools, the large numbers of prisoners, the break-up of homes, the incidence of marital break-down, the grief of heartbroken parents and widows and children, the fact that thousands of young people have never known peace in their streets - and you have some idea of the tragedy of it all.

The conflict can come very close to a clergyman living in the midst of it. More than thirty persons whom I knew personally have been killed in the violence. They included five Catholics who were shot by the I.R.A. allegedly as informers, one Protestant neighbour who was killed by the I.R.A. as a reprisal, two Catholic husbands and their wives who were killed by Loyalist paramilitary organisations, three Catholics who were killed by the police, three Protestant policemen who were killed by the I.R.A., a number of young prisoners who died on hunger-strike, two Catholic priests who were killed when ministering to the wounded. I had to officiate like my colleague at the funerals of many of the victims, some killed by Republican paramilitaries, some killed by Loyalist paramilitaries and some killed by police or by the British army. While the victims were more evenly balanced in the 1970's, most of the killings in the past few years have been carried out by the I.R.A. and most of the victims were Ulster Protestants. These are the crimes for which we Catholics, as the community from which they sprang, must ask forgiveness from our Protestant brothers and sisters.

In the words of the great Protestant Theologian Karl Barth: "every Christian sermon must be in part also a political statement". I don't wish to enter the political arena in stating that the Irish border is a very artificial thing. It does not follow any previously existing boundary; there are no large rivers to mark it or lakes or mountain ranges. It cuts across the most ancient units now in Ireland. My own diocese is divided by it, with three-fifths of the parishes north of the border and two-fifths south of the border. Three other dioceses are sundered by it. My native parish is divided by it, with two churches north of the border and one church south of the border. Several other parishes are cut in two in the same way. Many farms along the border have some of their fields in the north and some in the south. One road in my native area actually forms the border - one side of the road is in the north and one in the south. All this has undoubtedly increased the violence as people resent being cut off from their neighbours and it is impossible to provide full security along a frontier of this kind.

The anomalous nature of the Northern Ireland state is also shown by the difficulty in finding a satisfactory name for it. It is usually called Northern Ireland but the most northerly county in Ireland is in the Republic. It is sometimes called Ulster, but three of the nine counties of Ulster are in the Republic. It is sometimes called the Six Counties but this is regarded as offensive by Unionists. To call it Occupied Ireland is unjust to Unionists, as it suggests that they are foreign invaders.

Violence can never solve the problem of Northern Ireland. It can never produce a United Ireland. Bombs and bullets can only break and shatter, they can never unite. The only unity which would be worth having between north and south is a union of hearts, a union of the

people, not a union of two pieces of land. Forced union would only be coercion in reverse. Instead of producing peace it would only transfer the violence from a Six County framework into a Thirty-Two County framework, with the Unionists replacing the Nationalists as the group feeling coerced.

Another result of violence is the increase in unemployment. Both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have some of the highest unemployment figures in Western Europe. One in five of the population is out of work. For historical reasons it is the Catholic areas and towns of Northern Ireland that have the highest rates of unemployment. But the bombing of economic targets, of factories, shops, hotels, garages and so on has increased the number of unemployed. Part of the legacy in these areas is broken homes and uncontrollable teenagers.

The continuing violence in the north has occasioned huge expenditure on security in the Republic, even more per head of the population than in Britain. The Republic in the recent past has been suffering from a very severe recession - high taxation, closure of factories, considerable emigration of young people to Britain and U.S.A., cut-backs in educational and health services. The violence in the north has undoubtedly made the economic situation in the south much worse than it would otherwise have been.

When Pope John Paul II visited Ireland in 1979, he stated:

"Violence only delays the day of justice,
Violence destroys the work of justice".

Our sad experience in recent years bears out how correct the Pope was.

Yet the conflict in Northern Ireland is not primarily a religious war. Some people outside Ireland are led by the media to think that if Doctor Thompson and I were to meet in Northern Ireland instead of meeting in Germany we would start shooting at each other instead of talking to each other. But of course we have been meeting regularly during the past year when he was Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and we shall meet again ~~next~~ ^{on} Thursday ^(17 Sept) at the annual Ballymascanlon Conference when representatives of all the main Churches come together.

But while it is not a religious war, there is a religious aspect to it. The Churches do bear some blame for our tragic divisions and therefore do have responsibility for doing all they can to restore peace. It is of the nature of the Church to be that part of humanity which is already reconciled and can therefore be a reconciling influence on the community. Unless the Churches are working positively for reconciliation, they are failing to implement the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Mutual acceptance of differences is the beginning of reconciliation. Each Christian Communion must accept the other as it sees itself. As we Catholics become converted to Christ we shall become more conscious of the presence of Christ in our Protestant neighbours. As Christ increases in each Christian, so will the unity in Christ between ourselves and our fellow Christians increase.

It is the responsibility of Churchmen to point out the duty of their members to respect the convictions of others. Political leaders should be encouraged by the Churches to look on their aim as being to reach a

just agreement with their opponents rather than to achieve victory over them. The closer our relationship to Christ and the deeper our commitment to our own Church, the greater will be our respect for other Christians. Someone has compared the situation to the spokes of a wheel with Christ as the hub. The closer the spokes come to the hub, the closer they come to one another.

There is in many Northern Ireland Protestants a deep-seated fear of Rome. We Catholics find this hard to understand, yet we must take it seriously and seek to dispel it by reaching out to Protestants in brotherhood and love. We must try to convince our Protestant brothers and sisters that we respect their faith and the spiritual riches of their Protestant tradition. We are fated to share this land with our Protestant neighbours and friends, so let us share it not in competition or rivalry but as brothers and sisters under our common Father. Speaking on behalf of the Catholic Bishops in 1984 Doctor Cahal Daly declared:

"The Catholic Church in Ireland totally rejects the concept of a confessional state ... We believe that the alliance of Church and State is harmful for the Church and harmful for the State ... We would raise our voices to resist any constitutional proposals which might infringe or might imperil the civil and religious rights and liberties cherished by Protestants".

God has placed our two communities, Protestant and Catholic, Unionist and Nationalist, side by side on the island of Ireland. His intention was certainly not that we should be warring communities but in the words of St. Paul: "that out of the two He might create one single new man". The validity of both identities in Ireland and the right of

both to continue must be accepted as the basis for future peace. I would urge all Irish Catholics to ensure by their brotherly cooperation across the religious divide that northern Protestants will gradually come to realise that their best friends are really their Catholic neighbours and vice versa. In a growing secularist world Catholics and Protestants must present a common front for the defence of Christianity.

Our first step towards a solution to the Northern Ireland problem must therefore be to secure an end to the violence on all sides. The two communities are being driven further apart by the violence. They are being made more hostile to each, more suspicious, more fearful. Polarisation increases every time violence breaks out in a particular area; it gradually subsides again after a few months of peace and quiet in the same area.

Violence has continued now for more than eighteen years, yet it does not seem to have brought any side nearer to any of its stated objectives. Indeed its consequences are the exact opposite of those intended. Far from softening the opposition of Northern Unionists to a United Ireland republican violence has only made them more determined than ever to resist it. Similarly sectarian assassinations of Catholics have not made the Catholic population as a whole any more willing to return to a regime similar to the old Stormont.

The example of the Philippines and Poland in recent years offers some hope to Northern Ireland. Both countries seemed to be on the verge of civil war. Yet both countries effected a remarkable revolution by peaceful means.

States can respond only too effectively to violence by greater violence. What they cannot deal with is non-violent action by a united and disciplined community. The example of these two countries should encourage in Northern Ireland the view that political reforms can be won by peaceful means.

No one in Germany is likely to accept the idea that there is no solution to the problem of Northern Ireland. They will recall French-German relations in the past. The situation will become hopeless only when those who are working for a solution abandon hope.

Our conflict has also some bearing on world peace. A solution of it would be a splendid example to other trouble spots. It would give a great fillip to the movement for Christian Unity. We are a Christian people, both Protestant and Catholic, and at present our conflict brings shame on our profession of Christianity. Does St. Paul's stirring cry to the Corinthians: "Is Christ divided?" mean anything to us?

For all these reasons it is imperative that peace be restored in Northern Ireland without delay. The surest basis for our hope for peace is our Christian faith, which can inspire a massive mobilising of Christian love. Many people on both sides of the religious divide have by now shared in a great common suffering and even after their grief they have appealed for no revenge by their own side against the other. Shared suffering has opened hearts to sympathy and compassion. It has had a purifying and healing effect. It has pointed the way to our greatest weapon for peace - sincere, sustained prayer to God, that He, the author of peace, will listen to the cries of his afflicted children and bring them together in mutual love and forgiveness as brothers and sisters.