

## MYTHS OF REDEMPTIVE VIOLENCE

*"It may truly be said, without the shedding of blood there is no redemption"* - Patrick Pearse

### SACRAL LOYALISM AND NATIONALISM

The year 2012 inaugurated a decade of centenaries on the island of Ireland, and until 2022 it will be awash with reverential reminders of its bloody past. For the period 1912-1922 was shaped by what Rev. Johnston McMaster, following the American theologian Walter Wink, calls 'the myth of redemptive violence'. This is the notion that violence in the service of the nation is not only necessary but also works to bring order out of chaos and establish peace and security. It also implies that God favours those who conquer in this way and that the violence is to be remembered, honoured, sacralised and eulogised within the nation's story.

'Covenant Day', in which 30,000 people marched to commemorate the centenary of the signing of the Ulster Covenant, was held on 28th September 2012. The term 'covenant', borrowed from a pledge by 17th century Scottish Presbyterians, implied a sacred agreement between God and the people. The signing by half a million on 28th September 1912, blessed by the main Protestant churches in an atmosphere of religious devotion, has been described as the birth certificate of Northern Ireland. They pledged themselves to resist the 'conspiracy' to introduce Home Rule for Ireland 'by all means which may be found necessary'.

It was clear what this implied, for drilling had already begun, and in January 1913 the Ulster Volunteer Force, a loyalist army, was formally established by the Ulster Unionist Council and by the end of the year had 90,000 men in its ranks. The UVF motto was 'for God and Ulster', a phrase which sacralised the cause in suggesting a special relationship between the Christian divinity and Ulster Protestants and also

indicated the lethal fusion of religion and nationalism at the heart of the Irish malaise. In September 1913 Carson and Craig threatened to establish a Provisional government in Ulster if the province was included in any Home Rule settlement. In April 1914, 25,000 rifles were smuggled into the province most notably at Larne. Thus the gun, largely absent from Irish politics for nearly half a century, returned centre stage, courtesy of militant Ulster Protestantism.

This behaviour did not go unnoticed in Irish nationalist circles. In reply in November 1913 the Irish Volunteer Force was established and by June 1914 it numbered 130,000. It too smuggled in guns, most notably at Howth. By the summer of 1914, therefore, Ireland was on the brink of civil war, which was only averted by the outbreak of the First World War. But the violence in Ireland had hardly yet begun. The major Loyalist blood sacrifice came on 1st and 2nd July 1916 when 5,500 men of the 36th Ulster Division, formed from the UVF, lost their lives at the Battle of the Somme. As loyalists perceived it, the Somme sacrifice sealed the 1912 Covenant with their blood, no longer merely symbolically but now also literally. The British must honour their bravery by liberating them from the evils of Home Rule.

A few months earlier, it was republicans who made their blood sacrifice in the Easter Rising. In explaining the failure of constitutional nationalists, Padraig Pearse wrote that "they have conceived of nationality as a material thing, whereas it is a spiritual thing...They have not recognised in their people the image and likeness of God. Hence the nation is not to them all holy, a thing inviolate and inviolable, a thing that a man dare not sell or dishonour on pain of eternal perdition".

Again: "I do not know if the Messiah has yet come, and I am not sure that there will be any visible and personal Messiah in this redemption: the people itself will perhaps be its own Messiah, the people labouring, scourged, crowned with thorns, agonising and dying, to rise again immortal and impassible". Nationhood, he

believed, could only be achieved by taking up arms and, although the wrong people might be shot, "bloodshed is a cleansing and a satisfying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood".

Images of violence and sacrifice recur throughout Pearse's speeches and writings towards the end. In his graveside oration at the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa in 1915 he had said: "Life springs from death, and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations". He even welcomed the First World War: "The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields. Such august homage was never offered to God as this, the homage of millions of lives given gladly for love of country". MacDara, the hero of one of his plays, invokes the crucifixion: "One man can free a people as one man re-deemed the world... I will stand before the Gall (for-eigner) as Christ hung naked before men on a tree". At first, the socialist Connolly rejected this myth but ultimately he succumbed: "It may truly be said", he wrote, "without the shedding of blood there is no redemption".

Pearse identified the Irish Catholic nation with Jesus Christ. Ireland was a crucified nation which would have its resurrection and redemption. He and his fellow nationalists would reenact the sacrifice of Christ, and thus redeem the nation as Christ redeemed the world. And for the symbolism to be complete, the national crucifixion and resurrection had to take place at Easter. It is hardly surprising that the seven signatories of the 1916 Proclamation were all Catholics, for the Easter Rising was, in the words of Conor Cruise O'Brien, the most exalted expression of Irish Catholic nationalism.

Pearse's vision was shared by many Irish republicans at the time. Ernie O'Malley, an IRA commander during the Irish Civil War, put it thus: "One feels that one is always fighting for God and Ireland, for the spread of our spirituality such as it is, to counteract the agnosticism and materialism of our own and other countries" (quoted in Richard English: *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in*

*Ireland*, Macmillan, 2006, p294). In these years the IRA recited the Rosary at commemorations and tended to salute Catholic churches while they were on parade. In 1935 Mary MacSwiney, another hardline republican, wrote that “a social programme in accordance with Catholic principles is quite good enough for anyone” (English, op. cit. p294). There is no doubt that in the early twentieth century faith and fatherland were united in militant Irish republicanism.

Conor Cruise O’Brien in *Ancestral Voices* (1994) calls this ideology ‘sacral nationalism’, and in his essay on Bobby Sands (*Passion and Cunning*, 1988) he notes that Sands, like Pearse, saw himself as one of a line of martyrs for the Republic, whose sacrifice repeats the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. He adds: “The effect of elevating anyone prepared to kill and die for the Republic to the status of Jesus Christ is to annihilate, morally and spiritually, the adversaries of the Republic, whom the Republican Christs feel impelled to bump off. These adversaries of Christ are necessarily cast in the role, if not of Antichrist himself, then of the agents, or at best the dupes, of Antichrist. They deserve no mercy, and that is exactly what they get. This is the very essence of Holy War”.

There is indeed a thread that runs all the way through the events of 1912-22 and beyond. 1912 led to 1916 which in turn led to 1919 and the War of Independence, which led to Partition in 1921, leading to the Treaty and the Civil War of 1922-23. The formation of the illegal, armed UVF led to the formation of the illegal, armed Irish Volunteers. The Larne gunning running led to the Howth gun running. The resistance of Ulster unionists led to the resistance of nationalists. This thread of unionist and nationalist Holy War was resumed after 1969. In *Overcoming Violence* (the Columba Press, 2012), Johnson McMaster notes that the blood sacrifice theme still lingers as a ‘romantic virus’ in republican and loyalist psyches. “It suffuses the violence of 1969-2004 and still lingers in the mindsets”, he writes (p68). Why should the violence of 1912-22 be justified while the violence since 1969 is condemned?

The fact that the conflict is at least partly religious has already been argued by a number of writers, as we have seen. The struggle between loyalism and republicanism is in no small part a politicised expression of Ireland's religious division in which the active participants have in reality been waging a Holy War on behalf of their apparently opposing religious ideologies.

It therefore might seem strange to discover that they are really mirror images of each other. McMaster points to the similarities between the 1912 Covenant and the 1916 Proclamation. Both of course appeal to the same Christian God and both imply that God is on their side. If there is a difference, we could say that the Covenant is more an appeal to the Old Testament in harking back to God's covenants with the Jews, whereas the Proclamation alludes to the New Testament in drawing a parallel between the rebels and Jesus.

Yet, as McMaster insists, their god is the same violent god of death, a fundamental distortion of the pacifist gospel of Jesus. It encompasses "the Protestant and Catholic violent god-myth at the heart of a medieval interpretation of Christ's atonement symbolised and dramatised at the heart of the Eucharist" (*Overcoming Violence*, p108). It is there too in the myths of Finn and the Fianna, in the sacrifice of Cúchulainn, in the bold Fenian Men, in the Covenanters of 1912, in the UVF dead at the Somme, in the IRB of 1916, in Fianna Fail, the 'Soldiers of Destiny', in the *Soldier's Song* and in *God Save the Queen*. The Irish are obsessed with this myth of redemptive violence, as the tomes on war and religion in any local library's non-fiction section will verify.

Yet it is possible to relegate it to fiction. First of all, we need to divest ourselves of the false notions that these violent actions were necessary and a cause of celebration. Let's start on the unionist side. There was no conspiracy to impose Home Rule in 1912. The matter had been debated on and off for 40 years and the bill was passed by the British Parliament. The Covenant was a call to defy the rule

of law and take up arms against a legitimate authority. If it was wrong legally, it was also wrong in terms of the consequences. Not only did it inaugurate decades of violence but it also failed to stop Home Rule. Indeed, there is an irony in the fact that Northern Ireland was the only part of the island to be given what the Protestants had been determined to oppose.

As for 1916, it too was neither necessary nor worth celebrating. More than 250 innocent civilians died, 28 of them children, and it led to six mad years of civil war. The Proclamation's declaration that it cherished all Irish men and women equally was betrayed when its followers promptly murdered all Irish men and women who stood in their way. Thousands of Protestants fled the emergent Catholic Free State, which proceeded to render null and void the inclusive values proclaimed in 1916. After 1969, the Provisional IRA claimed inspiration and legitimacy from the 1916 Rising and believed that the struggle in the north was 'unfinished business'. But, according to Roy Foster, in his history of *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, the Rising was an exercise in irrationality, and its legacy was the modern Northern Ireland crisis. Constitutional nationalism would have achieved the same outcome without the divisions that ensued.

Second, although the Irish – unionist and republican – are very strong in claiming that they are a Christian people, this addiction to redemptive violence is the very negation of the ethic of Jesus Christ. As McMaster writes, Jesus has actually been an embarrassment to Christianity in his teaching and practice of active non-violence, especially in Matthew 5: turn the other cheek, give your cloak as well, go the second mile, and love your enemies. In the Irish culture of violence, this message has largely been ignored and distorted beyond recognition. It was, as McMaster says "a bloodlust let loose, revealing not heroism but the darkest side of being human" (p204). But, he adds, there was and always is an alternative with historical precedents, and the voices have always been present but drowned out:

“and there are too many promises of history unfulfilled in Ireland to allow for an uncritical acceptance of the violence, or for unethical remembering”.

From a humanist perspective, the political violence of 1969-2004 was completely and utterly futile and destructive. It killed 3,600 mostly innocent people and brought misery to their friends and relatives. It further divided an already divided community. It lamentably failed to achieve its aims. We can completely agree with McMaster’s conclusion that in Ireland we must categorically reject violence and leave it behind for good. To do this, we must nurture alternative values, values that are life-giving and not death-giving. As McMaster says, “The nurture of death, hatred, dying, sacrifice, all for Ulster and Ireland has been destructive of our humanity and society” (p221).

Perhaps, after all, it is not too much for a secular Humanist to ask Irish Christians to see their nasty, bloodstained past for what it is – a travesty of the peaceful, tolerant and inclusive message of their founder – and to start behaving like true Christians.

## **GREEN TERRORS**

Physical force republicanism has a long history in Ireland and in the modern era can be traced back to the United Irishmen of the 1790s. But there are crucial differences between its early and later incarnations. For example, the early leaders and inspirers were largely Protestant: Wolfe Tone, Thomas Russell, William Drennan and the United Irishmen in the 1790s, Robert Emmet and Thomas Russell in 1803, William Smith O’Brien, John Mitchel and the Young Irelanders in 1848, and James Stephens, who founded the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1858. In the second half of the 19th century, however, the Protestant representation in militant republicanism progressively disappeared. Indeed, since Parnell no leader of any form of Irish nationalism, whether constitutional or revolutionary, has been a Protestant. Not only were all the seven signatories of the 1916 Proclamation

Catholic but so too were all the leaders of the IRA since its inception in 1919. A survey of 917 prisoners convicted under the Defence of the Realm Act in 1917-19, for example, produced one declared 'agnostic' and no Protestants (P. Hart: *The IRA at War, 1916-23*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p123).

The IRA emerged from the Irish Volunteers, formed in 1913 in response to the Ulster Volunteers. In 1918, when Sinn Fein won 73 seats out of 108 in the general election and declared an Irish Republic, the Irish Volunteers were reorganised as the army of the Irish Republic, and soon began to refer to themselves as the Irish Republican Army. In the years 1919-21 it waged a vicious and brutal guerrilla war against British rule in which it was clearly the aggressors, killing several members of the RIC and destroying RIC barracks. After the signing of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, the IRA split into pro- and anti-treaty factions, and the latter then waged a bloody civil war against their former comrades.

Thus another difference from early republicanism had emerged. The targets of the leaders became predominantly Irish civilians. As Richard English suggests, "most of the victims of the violence during 1916-23 as a whole were civilians, members of no fighting group; most of the violence was directed at non-combatants, rather than taking place in military exchanges and battles between warring enemies. In some cases, indeed, the violence seems merely to have been directed against out-groups, those beyond the republican community, whether vagrants, homosexuals, strangers or Protestants" (*Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland*, Macmillan, 2006, p292). In fact, over the period 1919-23 the IRA killed more Irish people than British occupation forces. This set a pattern that would be repeated throughout the twentieth century.

In 1923 the IRA lost the Civil War but continued as a group with the aim of overthrowing the Irish Free State and the statelet of Northern Ireland, which had just been created, and establishing a 32-county Irish Republic. When the Second World War broke out, the IRA took a pro-German line and their leader Sean Russell went to Germany as a guest of the Nazis, whom he urged to use the IRA to attack British forces in Northern Ireland. Thus 'Irish freedom' was identified by extreme republicans with a Nazi victory.

By the early 1950s, the IRA was largely ineffective, but in 1956 it launched a border campaign in which flying columns mostly from the south attacked Northern Ireland in guerrilla warfare raids. But it made little impact and was called off in 1962. The IRA appeared to be a spent force, and indeed in 1969 when Catholic areas were attacked by loyalists in the August riots, IRA was interpreted on gable walls to stand for 'I Ran Away'. In December 1969 the IRA split into the Officials and the Provisionals, partly over the response to these attacks. The Belfast IRA blamed the Dublin leadership for the failure to defend Catholic areas in August. By 1971 The Provisionals had inherited most of the existing IRA organisation in the north and the more militant IRA members in the rest of Ireland. The Officials, who were now in a minority, largely subscribed to the Marxist view that republicans should seek to unite the working class against the interests of capital, and abandoned the armed struggle in 1972.

The Provos, in contrast, resolved not only, or even primarily, to defend their local communities but also to use violence aggressively in order to destroy a state they believed to be doomed. So they embarked on a 25-year campaign during which they planted bombs in bus stations, boats, pubs, hotels, shopping centres, hospitals and at memorials – actions designed to cause maximum carnage and terror. PIRA's dirty, squalid 'war' also involved shooting and maiming anyone who

was designated a 'legitimate' target – an elastic term which encompassed policemen as well as soldiers, workers as well as security personnel, politicians as well as drug addicts.

A brutal, sectarian dimension to the Provisional campaign was evident in the relentless bombing of Protestant businesses and attacks on farms, civilians and policemen in the border areas. In 1992 a British army officer who had served in Northern Ireland summed up this policy of ethnic cleansing by pointing out that in Fermanagh and South Tyrone there were 203 murders carried out between 1971 and 1989, of which 178 were carried out by republicans, but only 14 of which had resulted in successful convictions. In other words, the IRA were able to exploit the border and use the Republic as a safe haven because successive Irish governments largely refused to co-operate with the forces of law and order in the North.

The basis of the romantic indulgence towards these killers was the delusion that the IRA was a liberation army waging an armed struggle against the last vestiges of British colonial rule. Frequent parallels were made with other 'freedom fighters' like the PLO and the ANC, with Gerry Adams seen as the equivalent of an Arafat or a Mandela. The IRA of course carefully fostered this myth. In November 1993 it stated: "The British government and its armed forces bear ultimate responsibility for the conflict and the armed struggle is aimed primarily at them". This statement was made in the wake of the Shankill bomb which, like most IRA atrocities, killed no British forces but instead ended the lives of Irish people in a horrific manner.

In the liberation myth British imperialists not only ruled Ireland in order to exploit the country for their own benefit but also adopted the age-old policy of divide-and-rule. Ulster Protestant objections to a united Ireland are therefore the

misguided creations of a British ruling class and their lackeys in Ireland. According to the 1916 Proclamation, which for many republicans has the status of holy writ, the differences among the Irish themselves were 'carefully fostered by an alien government'. Partition itself was the classic colonial stratagem and it has dictated the course of politics both north and south ever since. Thus the sectarian conflict in Ulster has been kept alive in order to split and thereby weaken the working class. The only real solution is to remove Britain's presence and end partition.

Danny Morrison of Sinn Fein expressed these sentiments in an article in *Fortnight* magazine in 1985: "All deaths are tragic and all the bloodshed is attributable to the British presence, without which sectarianism - the basis for the six-county state - would wither. Loyalists have no right to treat Nationalists as second-class citizens in their own country. Republicans believe that we will not get our civil rights until we get our national rights, which means British withdrawal and self-determination for the Irish people as a whole" (23rd September 1985).

So there you have it - all the murder and mayhem perpetrated by the IRA was really the fault of the nasty British. But this analysis is highly flawed, ignoring as it does the crucial divisions with Ireland itself, divisions which in recent years IRA/Sinn Fein themselves exacerbated. These internal divisions existed even before the Protestant settlers arrived. As John Mitchel in the 19th century pointed out, there were more than a hundred local kingdoms who were frequently at war with one another. The aim of the Ulster Plantation itself was not to divide and rule but rather to displace the native Irish and crush Gaelic culture altogether, thus bringing peace and stability to the area. This policy failed because the natives were not dispersed but lived in close proximity to the settlers.

Clearly, therefore, the conflict between the two main groups did not require any stimulus from outside. Even partition itself was seen by Lloyd George as a temporary compromise to avert civil war. The Government of Ireland Act, 1920, provided for the creation of a Council of Ireland which would work for the establishment of a Parliament 'for the whole of Ireland'. Nor can the British 'presence' in Northern Ireland today remotely be regarded as imperialist. Most British businessmen with interests in the island would prefer a united country, while the province is also a drain on the British Exchequer. A clear majority of the British people also favour unification, as shown in various opinion polls in recent years. As for the military 'presence', the British Army arrived in 1969 as essentially a peace-keeping force and was initially welcomed by many in the Catholic population as providing protection from sectarian attacks.

The border as fixed in 1920 did give the Protestants a trumped-up majority. But this trick was done to avoid the prospect of tribal war which was very real at the time. Now, Northern Ireland remains part of the UK because this is what the majority of people in the Six Counties want. They may or may not be misguided, but most Protestants are determined not to be 'bombed into a united Ireland' or, as many view it, to become a minority in a Catholic country. As Stewart suggests, "it is towards weakening this determination that all the efforts of Irish nationalism ought in theory to have been aimed. Instead these have been largely directed to strengthening it in every possible way" (A.T.Q. Stewart: *The Narrow Ground*, p162).

The focus of British people tends to be on atrocities like the Brighton Bomb in 1984 or Canary Wharf in 1996, but most victims of the IRA campaign since 1971 were fellow Ulster people. To claim to be resisting 'foreign oppression' when in reality you are waging a war against people you claim as your own is, to say the least, a dangerous form of self-deception. The IRA must be the only example of 'freedom

fighters' in the world whose main target is a section of the population whom they claim to be liberating.

Many on The Left in Britain also live under the illusion that the IRA/Sinn Fein is a socialist movement, as if it were remotely socialist to incite the working class to cut one another's throats. Like Mussolini, the IRA has flirted with socialism, as it did briefly in the 1930s. But again, like Mussolini, its true identity has been fascist rather than socialist. Arthur Griffith and the early Sinn Fein movement were clearly anti-socialist and condemned the Dublin Dock Strike of 1913. In the early 1940s, two Sinn Fein leaders, Frank Ryan and Sean Russell, even tried to forge an alliance with Nazi Germany. In the late forties, fifties and early sixties leaders like Sean South, a member of the Marie Duce organisation, believed in a strongly Catholic Irish state. The founding document of the present Sinn Fein Party in 1970 referred to 'our Irish and Christian values', which were contrasted with the 'extreme socialism' of the Officials, who as the Workers' Party could possibly be described as slightly left of New Labour.

Sinn Fein/IRA throughout the Troubles were essentially fascist Catholic nationalists whose occasional socialist tags provided a gloss of international legitimacy for their terrorist activities. If fascism is fanatical, violent nationalism, then Sinn Fein/IRA were a modern paradigm case. Their creed was not that of Wolfe Tone who tried to unite 'Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'. It was not the creed of Thomas Davis who advised Irishmen to look to their 'common secular interests'. Rather, it was ultimately the creed of Patrick Pearse and the leaders of the 1916 Rising.

We have already cited some of Pearse's words and seen how nationalism was a religion in which republicans were recreators of the Christian myth and armed rebellion was a Holy War. This was essentially the creed of IRA/Sinn Fein during its

'war'. As Richard Jay suggests: "It is one of death and resurrection, the successive crushing of Ireland's will and its reemergence, Phoenix-like, from the ashes. There are Judases who betray the national cause, and martyrs whose blood was spilled to rejuvenate it" (Richard Jay: Nationalism, in R. Eccleshall etc, ed: *Political Ideologies*, p205). In a review of *The Provisional IRA* by Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie in the *Belfast Telegraph* (*Belfast Telegraph*, 24th June 1987), Father Denis Faul acknowledged that armed republicanism is 'a religion with theology strong on identifying heretics'. He was baffled as to where they get their religion but speculated that 'the devotion to the shedding of blood throws one back to the Aztecs or the religion of ancient Islam'. But Father Faul did not have to look so far. Redemption through blood sacrifice lies at the heart of Christianity and, as we have seen, the idea of republicans as imitators of Christ pervades the writings of Patrick Pearse which are studied in Catholic schools and republican homes.

The devotion and the hatred which motivated Bobby Sands and the other hunger strikers to become martyrs in 1981 are thus based on a Catholic myth, a myth to which even Connolly succumbed in 1916 when he wrote: "It may truly be said, 'without the shedding of blood there is no redemption'. This transference of sadomasochistic religious beliefs into the republican tradition stretching from Pearse to the present day has transformed a once noble ideal into a destructive, divisive, mystical fascist ideology. It offers yet further proof of the damage that a religious upbringing can do to people.

It is also a concept of Irish nationality which is totally alien to non-Catholics. Where indeed do they fit into the militant republican schemata? The answer is: only in a distant past. Wolfe Tone and other early separatists are venerated by the modern republican movement, yet there is no logical historical thread between the 18th and early 19th century Protestant republicans and their modern Catholic

counterparts. The former were inclusive, pluralist children of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution; the latter are exclusive, mystical offspring of 20th century ethnic nationalism.

Gerry Adams has sometimes referred to 'our Protestant brothers and sisters,' but it has a hollow ring. For the truth is that they were the real enemy of IRA/Sinn Fein, not the British. The latter were only a smokescreen which served to conceal the real sectarian nature of modern Irish republicanism.

During the Troubles, the IRA received most of its support from people who regarded it as an organisation that would defend and enhance the rights of Catholics. It was seen by them as representing Catholics against Protestants. This, too, was quite an achievement in the face of the reality. For the organisation itself was actually prepared to endanger the lives of ordinary Catholics in order to further its own long-term objectives. At times it used the local population as a shield with which to provoke the British army and loyalists into attack. As Malachi O'Doherty suggests, loyalist violence against Catholics increased as IRA violence against the police and army and commerce increased, and he concludes that "the Catholics of Belfast felt that they were never as well defended as when the IRA was stood down" (Malachi O'Doherty: *The Trouble With Guns*, p92).

While deliberately putting Catholic people at risk through this strategy, the IRA also terrorised them into giving it their support. Killings and beatings and knee-cappings of Catholics were an endemic feature of life in Catholic areas since the Troubles began. The murder of Jean McConville, a Protestant, was clearly a warning to Catholic women in West Belfast that if they defied the IRA and fraternised with British soldiers, they would suffer a similar fate. The steady increase in political strength suggested that Sinn Fein have had considerable success in frightening Catholics into submission to their will. It was a great cause for concern that while

extremism weakened on the Unionist side of the divide, it seemed to be growing on the Catholic side at the expense of the moderate SDLP. Eventually, Sinn Fein came to represent the majority of Nationalists in Northern Ireland. This was not a pleasant prospect for those who hoped to see compromise triumph. The jury is still out on whether Sinn Fein have any interest in a peaceful, stable society in the Six Counties, or in persuading a majority of Protestants of the value of Irish unity.

Green Terror was thus directed not only against the majority in the province; it was also aimed at bending the will of its own tribe to its fascist ends. It was therefore an insuperable obstacle to Irish unity in two respects. First, the more it pressed for that goal, the more determined were the majority of Protestants to reject it. And secondly, the more ruthless its methods, the more it rendered that goal unworthy of achievement. If the people cannot live together in Northern Ireland, then they cannot live together as part of anywhere else. It is only when they have learned to live with one another in peace and harmony that the border will rightly 'wither away'.

## **ORANGE DISORDERS AND LOYALIST HORRORS**

While Sinn Fein/IRA is a political movement with religious undercurrents, the Orange Order is a religious movement with strong political dimensions. In his *Autumn Journal* Louis MacNeice refers to the 'voodoo of the Orange bands' and it is an apt metaphor for the entire philosophy and ritual of Orangeism. Superstition, blood and thunder drum-bangers, clerical witch-doctors casting evil spells on the enemy tribe, burnt papal effigies, sacrifice - or at least the remembrance of sacrifice - are all woven together into a primitive and repulsive brew which is annually inflicted on Ulster society even well into the 21st century.

What is the Orange Order and why has it exerted such a powerful influence on Irish Protestants over two centuries? These questions do not permit of easy answers, because Orangeism is a mysterious beast with more than one head: beer-swilling, venom-spitting drummers march cheek by jowl with teetotal, dog-collared bible-thumpers.

“In any study of Orangeism, two propositions have to be accepted as being of great importance: first, it has a religious connotation; second, it is nonsense to try to understand Orangeism until it is recognised that its Christian faith is paramount. The commitment of Orangeism is to Christianity and to the realisation of man’s need of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour”. (*In Glorious Memory, An Historical Account of Orangeism in Lecale District*, p2). Thus begins an introduction by Rev S.E. Long to a booklet on Lecale District No 2, Co Down. The introduction continues by expressing gratitude to the Protestant Reformers for recovering “the purity of the faith which had been adulterated for centuries by those who were not content with the fundamentals of Primitive Christianity but who had to make such additions to it that it was reduced to something different from and less than the Gospel of Jesus Christ”.

Orangemen, therefore, seek to ‘stand firm in the faith’ of fundamentalist Christianity, and as such they display all the deficiencies of fundamentalism anywhere: a dogmatic claim to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; an intolerance of the beliefs of others, especially Roman Catholics; a hostility towards a rational and scientific worldview; a belief in the subordination of civil society to religious power; a patriarchy in which women play a secondary role; and a puritanical killjoy morality. In short, the ‘purity of the faith’ means

adherence to a reactionary, unscientific and poisonous lifestyle which has no place in a liberal, pluralist democracy.

The Orange Order is not only a matter of theology. The 'Orange' comes from William of the House of Orange, who is regarded as the saviour of Irish Protestant society because of his defeat of the Catholic James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. There is much myth-making by Orangemen about this event and its aftermath. The Pope was actually on the side of William, not that of James, the ally of Louis XIV who had been excommunicated by the Pope. James himself established greater freedom in England for dissenters like Presbyterians than many of his successors. William's victory did not in fact establish 'civil and religious liberty for all' in Ireland but inaugurated a century of persecution of dissenters as well as Catholics.

Such facts hardly matter to the Order, for 'civil and religious liberty' has always been a code phrase for the crushing of Catholicism. This sectarianism was inherent from the beginning. In the 18th century scores of secret societies emerged, usually in the first place to combat landlordism but increasingly to organise attacks against members of the other religion. By the 1780s the two main protagonists in Armagh, a county equally divided between Protestants and Catholics, were the Peep O'Day Boys and the Defenders. Feuds between them raged for a dozen years, and in 1795 they fought a pitched battle at the Diamond in which the Catholic Defenders were heavily defeated. The Peep O'Day Boys then began a reign of terror for several months in which possibly thousands of Catholics were driven from their homes.

It was then that some of the victors and their supporters decided to form an Orange Society. The founders met in Sloan's Inn at Loughall, 3 miles from the

Diamond. They included Rev George Maunsel, rector of Drumcree, who preached "so zealously to his congregation on 1st July 1795 that his hearers went out and broke all the doors and windows of Roman Catholics in the vicinity and murdered two unoffending peasants who were digging turf in a bog" (*Aiken McClelland: The Foundation of the Orange Order*, p11).

Another founding member was Captain John Gifford, commander of the Royal Dublin Militia in Portadown. To him are attributed the adoption of the title of Orangemen, their original oath and obligation, and the first regulations of the Society. He himself wrote to a friend that he had founded at Loughall a society that for generations would 'crib both Pope and Popery in Ireland' (quoted in McClelland, p8). This quasi-military aspect of Orangeism is seen in the number of lodges by 1798 that were founded in the militia and yeomanry, including the Royal Tyrone regiment, the Fermanagh Regiment, the North Cork Militia, the Donegal Militia and the Enniskillen Dragoons. LOL 430 enrolled themselves into the Inch Yeomanry and fought at the Battle of Ballynahinch.

Within 3 years of its foundation, the Orange Order had become a national movement, sponsored unofficially by the government as a bulwark against the threatened unity of Protestant and Catholic posed by the United Irishmen. In 1797 the Dublin Lodge was formed and included many of the gentry and agents of the government. On 12th July that year General Lake, officer commanding in Ulster, inspected the Orange parade in Belfast, then travelled by coach to Lisburn and Lurgan to review the parades there.

Lake's subordinate in Dungannon, General Knox, wrote: "I have arranged...to increase the animosity between Orangemen and the United Irish. Upon that animosity depends the safety of the centre counties of the North. Were the

Orangemen disarmed or put down, or were coalesced with the other party, the whole of Ulster would be as bad as Antrim and Down" (National Library of Ireland, Lake MSS 56). During the 1798 Rebellion thousands of Orangemen fought for the government, frequently treating suspects brutally and earning a reputation for bigotry which has survived to this day. So it was that the state connived with a sectarian paramilitary organisation to defeat attempts by Tone, Drennan and others to forge a common unity of 'Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter' in Ireland.

The government's response to 1798 was to unite the Dublin and Westminster Parliaments. 20 members of the Grand Lodge of Ireland sat in the Dublin Parliament and 18 of them voted against the Act of Union, seeing it as a threat to the Protestant ascendancy and fearing that it would be followed by Catholic Emancipation.

In the first two decades of the 19th century Orangeism suffered a setback, but it was revived by Catholic Emancipation after 1829 and the Repeal movement under Daniel O'Connell. The revolutionary inclinations of many Presbyterians evaporated with the rise of this Catholic nationalism. They became staunch defenders of the Union, and pillars of the Orange Order.

The resurgence of Orangeism and its growth among Presbyterians were also greatly assisted by the rise of bigoted clerics, notably Cooke, Drew and Hanna. They sowed the hateful thoughts which reaped the violent deeds. In 1834 Henry Cooke, a leading Presbyterian minister, addressed a massive political rally organised by Orange landlords at Hillsborough, and pledged a Protestant union in the face of the common enemy. In the following year, when the Order swelled to about 100,000 members, the Orange celebrations ended in a confrontation between the Orangemen and the authorities in Sandy Row in which several

people were sabred by the military, a great number wounded, and a man and a woman shot dead.

Sectarian riots and conflict soon became a fact of life in Ulster. In a confrontation between Orangemen - 'all armed to the teeth' (*Belfast Newsletter*, 20th July 1849) - and Catholics at Dolly's Brae, near Castlewellan, in 1849, at least 30 Catholics were killed. This was a march, like Garvaghy Road, through a Catholic area in defiance of the local magistrates who had urged them to avoid the route. The 'Battle of Dolly's Brae' is celebrated in Orange banners and folklore to this day, giving the lie to the notion that the Orange Order is not an inherently sectarian and militaristic institution.

On 12th July 1857 Thomas Drew, a Church of Ireland minister and Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, preached a sermon before more than 2,000 people in Christ Church, in which he claimed that "the cells of the Pope's prisons were paved with the calcined bones of men and cemented with human gore and human hair" (quoted in Andrew Boyd: *Holy War in Belfast*, p12). The whole sermon was a fanatical tirade against the Catholic Church and 'the arrogant pretences of Popes and the outrageous dogmata of their blood-stained religion'. Drew whipped the congregation up to near hysteria and had them cheering every time they heard the name 'William' and howling when the Pope and Rome were mentioned. For many Orangemen, the sermon was a call to arms. Riots followed for a week, during which several Catholics were shot dead and others driven from their homes.

The liberal newspaper *The Northern Whig* described the Orange lodges as 'ghastly institutions' and blamed them 'for all the atrocities in this town'. They were, it continued, 'satires on Christianity' and must be abolished. An official inquiry, which

published Drew's inflammatory sermon as an appendix, agreed. It asked the Orange Order to consider if there was any need to keep the movement in existence: "The Orange system seems to us to have no other practical result than as a means of keeping up the Orange festivals, and celebrating them, leading as they do to violence, outrage, religious animosities, hatred between classes, and, too often, bloodshed and loss of life".

Drew was far from being alone in his militant anti-Catholicism. The many others included Hugh Hanna, minister of Berry Street Presbyterian Church and later St Enoch's in Carlisle Circus. The sermons and pamphlets of 'Roaring' Hanna, "one of the most uncompromising of Protestants and one of the most loyal and faithful of Orangemen" (.R.M. Sibbert; quoted in Meredith and Kennaway: *The Orange Order*, p20), were the catalyst of numerous disturbances. When Gladstone introduced his first Home Rule Bill in 1886 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland passed unanimous resolutions opposing it. They did not require Lord Randolph Churchill to 'play the Orange card' - they played it hard and fast themselves. Hanna made sermons and speeches in which he warned the authorities that Protestants had 'effective means of resistance': "Every capable loyalist should be enrolled in a loyal defensive union to meet any emergency that may arise. Let captains of hundreds, captains of fifties and captains of tens be elected and their corps constructed to meet the day of danger" (quoted in Boyd: op. cit. p142).

Hanna was one of many Orangemen calling for mobilisation to fight Home Rule. Rev William Johnston of Ballykilbeg, who had led an Orange parade in 1867 in defiance of a ban for which he served a short spell in prison and was afterwards elected MP, told the Commons that resistance would be offered 'at the point of a bayonet'. After the 1886 Bill was defeated, Johnston wrote in his dairy: "We

stopped drilling for the moment". What happened instead were riots and bonfires in which about 50 people were killed. From his pulpit Hanna told his congregation that "it was right that the loyalty of the land should celebrate as it did the victory that God has given us" (quoted in Jonathan Bardon: *A History of Ulster*, p382).

Johnston, Master of Lecale District Lodge for 45 years, saw the political as well as religious potential of the Orange Order. He wrote: "Popery is something more than a religious system: it is a political system. It is a religio-political system for the enslavement of the body and soul of man and it cannot be met by any mere religious system or by any mere political system. It must be opposed by such a combination as the Orange Society, based upon religion and carrying over religion into the politics of the day" (quoted in F. Wright: *European Journal of Sociology*, XIV No 2).

The Unionist Party, founded in 1886, fulfilled Johnston's hope. The fusion of Puritan religion and politics in Ireland was effected by the combination of the Orange Order and the Unionist Party. After 1886 the Order itself received a huge influx of country gentlemen, clergymen of all Protestant denominations, business and professional people, farmers and artisans. As O'Neill writes: "It became a highly respectable as well as an exceedingly powerful political organisation" (R. O'Neill: *Ulster's Stand for Union*). During the Home Rule Crisis of 1912-14 the Orange Order was again prominent. It assisted in the drafting of the Solemn League and Covenant and issued a circular to all lodges approving of enrolment in the Ulster Volunteer Force. Leading Orangemen were deeply involved in the gun-running of 1914.

Throughout the 50 years of Stormont's existence after 1921 virtually every Unionist MP and therefore members of the government were Orangemen. The lodges were

heavily represented in the Ulster Unionist Council. Membership of the Order was a sine qua non of political advancement in the party. All the Unionist local authorities were dominated by members of the Orange lodges. If the Church of England was the Tory Party at prayer, then the Unionist Party, through the Order, was the Puritan God in power. The Order not only exercised considerable influence over the Unionist Party but was also highly successful in promoting that party and its values among the wider Protestant population. Here it acted as a powerful unifying force, bringing together Protestants of all ages, classes and denominations in fairly solid support for both Unionism and Puritanism.

In so far as it managed its own affairs, Ulster between 1922 and 1972, far from ensuring 'civil and religious liberty for all', displayed the classic symptoms of the Puritan state. Its obvious manifestation was an ingrained anti-Catholicism. Wholesale segregation and discrimination, especially in jobs, housing and services, turned the Catholic population into an oppressed minority almost on a par with Blacks in South Africa, where a Puritan ethos also prevailed among the White rulers.

The persistent rationale for this treatment, if admitted at all, was that Catholics were disloyal and a threat to the state, not that they were Catholics as such. This is the stock defence made again and again by Orangeism. According to the Order's rules, an Orangeman must abstain from all uncharitable words, actions or sentiments towards his Roman Catholic brethren. But in practice this has been ignored, and the leaders – the bowler-hatted toffs, not the working class jobs – set the bad example. Sir Basil Brooke, later Ulster's second Prime Minister, declared at the 12th July celebration in 1933 that he 'had not a single Roman Catholic' about his place and appealed to loyalists to employ 'Protestant lads and lassies'. In the same year Sir Joseph Davison, Grand Master of the Belfast Orange Lodge, stated

that Protestant employers should recognise 'their duty to their Protestant brothers and sisters and employ them to the exclusion of Roman Catholics' (*quoted in Gary MacEoin: Northern Ireland: Captive of History, p60*).

Craigavon, formerly Master of Lecale District Lodge and then Prime Minister, defended this approach by saying that "I have always said I am an Orangeman first and a politician and a Member of Parliament afterwards... All I boast is that we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant state" (quoted in Bardon, op. cit. p538-9). In 1934 Brooke repeated his advice not to employ Catholics, 'ninety nine per cent of whom are disloyal'. The 'disloyalty' of many Catholics to the state was understandable in view of its undemocratic creation and the blatant discrimination practised against them. Nor is the record of Orangeism exactly conducive to Catholic goodwill. The moral imperative lay with Protestants in positions of civil and religious authority to make Catholics feel at home in the polity but patently no such effort was made until the 1960s.

There are many liberal Protestants in Ulster, but it was not liberalism that prevailed under this Orange hegemony. The Puritan state opposed or rejected many of the progressive social and moral reforms introduced into Britain since the war. Orange politicians opposed the 1948 National Assistance Act which was, however, applied throughout the UK. They kept out the 1967 Abortion Act and abortion is still illegal in Ulster. They also for a time 'saved Ulster from sodomy' by rejecting the 1967 Act legalising homosexuality, which was eventually introduced under Direct Rule in 1982. They also opposed civil partnerships for gays, and later made the existence of such partnerships an excuse for opposing gay marriage. And they temporarily preserved 'the sanctity of the family' by opposing the 1969 Divorce Reform Act, finally introduced under Direct Rule in 1978. In short, the Orange state blocked all measures which offended Puritan ethics. This repressive sexual morality was in

substance identical to that which prevailed in the 'unfree' Catholic state across the border.

Orange jibes at the cultural repression of the Irish Republic are also deeply tainted with irony. For the Orange state would have censored literature if it had the power to do so; in the theatre and the cinema where it did have local control it showed itself every bit as circumscribed in its commitment to liberty as the Republic. In 1959 it succeeded for a time in preventing the staging of Sam Thompson's play *Over the Bridge*, which used vividly plain language to portray the bigotry of Protestant shipyard workers. Films were frequently banned or cut: in 1967 Belfast Corporation banned the film version of *Ulysses*, and in 1988 Belfast's moral godfathers effectively stopped the screening of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, after fundamentalists had complained that it was blasphemous. Even as late as 2014 the same accusation was levelled at the Reduced Shakespeare Company's production of *The Complete Work of God (abridged)*, which was banned by Newtownabbey council.

And so we have returned to the matter of Christianity, or rather the Orange version of it. Orangemen are indeed antiquated Christian soldiers, marching as to war on behalf of a mythically 'pure' Gospel which never existed and of which they themselves are such an appalling example. The Cookes and the Drews, the Hannas and the Nicolsens, the Smyths and the Paisleys will all claim that they did violence to no man. But then neither did Hitler himself kill anyone. It was they who sowed the seeds of hatred towards their fellow Catholic Christians, a hatred which is endemic to Orangeism since its beginnings.

'Civil and religious liberty for all' has been a travesty in the hands of the Orange Order, a weird mixture of reactionary Christianity and militarism created out of

bloodshed to celebrate bloodshed. A pamphlet, *The Order on Parade*, argues that its parades are no different from other celebrations, like the 4th of July in the United States or St Patrick's Day. But there are few examples in civilised countries of parades celebrating the triumphs of civil conflicts, victories of one group over their fellow countrymen. Orange marches are all about banners, drumming and playing tunes of songs jeering at or triumphing over their Catholic neighbours. Derry, Aughrim, the Boyne, the Diamond, Garvagh, Dolly's Brae, were all battles or skirmishes which kept the papists firmly in their place.

Loyalism has been described as a working class militant version of Orangeism. The Ulster Volunteer Force was formed in 1913, vowing to resist by force if necessary any attempts by the British Government to 'impose' Home Rule on Ulster, and in 1914 they smuggled 25,000 rifles into the province. It was temporarily revived in the early 1920s, but was absorbed into the Ulster Special Constabulary. The UVF was reconstituted in 1966 with the motto 'For God and Ulster'. It was followed by the UDA/UFF in 1971/2 and the Red Hand Commandos in 1972. Loyalist paramilitaries were responsible for about 30% of all deaths in the Troubles and nearly half of all civilian deaths. The vast majority of their victims were Irish Catholics, who were often killed at random in brutal sectarian attacks. All Catholics were treated as potential enemies: sometimes they were killed in 'retaliation' for IRA actions and sometimes simply to terrorise the Catholic community so much that it would eventually force the IRA to stop its campaign.

The Orange Order has often been accused of associating with Loyalist paramilitaries such as the UVF and the UDA. Although it condemns political violence, the fact of the matter is that several leading loyalist militants were members including Robert Bates, one of the so-called Shankill Butchers, and a few Orange bands still tout the provocative emblems of loyalist paramilitary groups. In

terms of personnel, while there is some overlap, the majority of Orangemen would want to distance themselves from the paramilitaries. Yet in terms of ideology, there is not a great deal of difference. The components of the Loyalist world view – macho militarism, bigotry, racism, sexism, homophobia, right-wing imperialism, extreme monarchism – are perhaps more explicit but they are not a million miles from the Orange mindset too.

There is much talk in Loyalist circles of social losses, of working class loyalist communities in irreversible retreat, deindustrialisation, demographic decline, low rates of educational achievement, high rates of family breakdown, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and so on. Yet these are features that the poorer Protestant districts of Belfast, Portadown or Ballymoney share with those of Liverpool or Glasgow. They are certainly not unique to Northern Ireland as part of a Europe suffering the worst recession in modern times.

They are also problems that they share with the very people whom they stubbornly and illogically persist in treating as their worst enemy: their working class Catholic brothers and sisters. It is a complete myth that the Protestant working class are the fall guys of the peace process and that they have lost out to nationalists. 14 of the 20 most deprived wards in Northern Ireland are predominantly Catholic. Only in terms of education do Protestants fall behind, and here they have nobody to blame but themselves. Yet, instead of uniting with Catholics in brotherly solidarity in the face of capitalist cruelty, greed, corruption and incompetence, Loyalists prefer to inflict wounds on themselves and their Catholic neighbours.

The evidence from the 2011 census is that an increasing number of the minority want to remain in the United Kingdom. Yet Loyalism behaves as if it would actually

feel more secure if the reverse were the truth, almost as if Catholic unionists were devious creatures who were less to be trusted than the more transparent enemy of Catholic nationalism. Withdraw the 'lifeline' of the IRA and the threat to the Union and we now see Loyalism stripped bare, with little to feed on beyond a macho 'hard men' culture, a culture which is inherently against civilisation, against education, and against progress. There is clearly an identity crisis in which Loyalists, faced with a vanishing enemy within and a declining Britishness without, no longer know who they are.

For good people to think bad thoughts or do bad things, it takes a bad mindset. Working class Protestants are decent people but they desperately need a view of the world more in keeping with their better nature. They will not find it in the culture that has enslaved them for too long to a bitter and hate-filled philosophy that harms their own real interests as well as the wider community. In truth, Loyalism is nothing but a poison that eats away at the very soul of the Protestant working class, depriving them of any decency, refinement, manners or good sense. It has absolutely nothing to commend itself.

Orangeism/Loyalism is rotten to the core and cannot reform itself. It serves only to trap Ulster people in the hatreds of the past. It is indeed a mirror image of the Green ideology which it so abhors. Both share the same uncompromising totalitarianism of outlook, the same intolerance of opposition, the same ethic of repressive moralism. Both are inimical to peace and progress in the wider society.