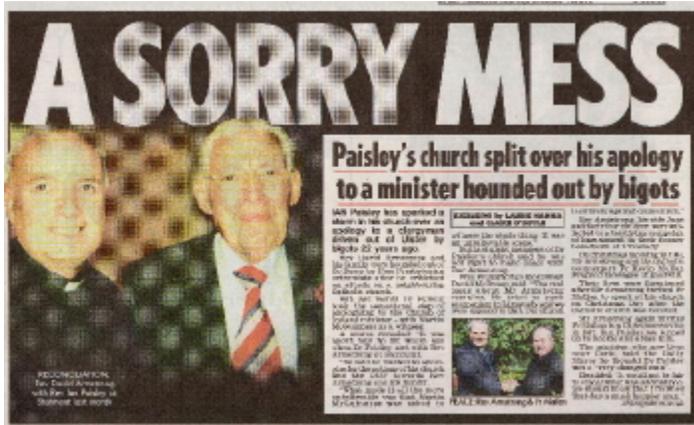




The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Newspapers allege Dr Paisley apologised for Free Presbyterian protest



Rev David Armstrong and Dr Paisley

Here is the text of the article in the "Daily Mirror" of December 15th 2007.

Paisley's church split over his apology to a minister hounded out by bigots

IAN Paisley has sparked a storm in his church over an apology to a clergyman driven out of Ulster by bigots 22 years ago.

Rev David Armstrong and his family were hounded out of Co Derry by

Free Presbyterian extremists after he criticised an attack on a neighbouring Catholic church.

But last month Dr Paisley took the sensational step of apologising to the Church of Ireland minister - with Martin McGuinness as a witness.

A source revealed: "It was about four to six weeks ago when Dr Paisley met with Rev Armstrong at Stormont. "He said he wanted to apologise for the actions of his church and the DUP towards Rev Armstrong and his family.

"What made it all the more unbelievable was that Martin McGuinness was asked to witness the whole thing. It was an unbelievable scene."

But last night members of Dr Paisley's church said he was not right to make peace with Rev Armstrong.

Free Presbyterian spokesman David McIlveen said: "The real issue about Mr Armstrong remains. He tried to push ecumenism in Limavady and we were opposed to that. Our church is entirely against ecumenism."

Rev Armstrong, his wife June and their four children were subjected to a terrifying campaign of harassment in their former hometown of Limavady.

On Christmas morning in 1983, Mr Armstrong and his Catholic counterpart Fr Kevin Mullan swapped messages of goodwill. Their lives were threatened after Mr Armstrong invited Fr Mullan to speak at his church on Christmas Day after the Catholic church was bombed.

Mr Armstrong again invited Fr Mullan to a Christmas service in 1984. But Paisleyites turned up to heckle and abuse him. The minister, who now lives near Cork, told the Daily Mirror he thought Dr Paisley was a "very changed man".

He added: "It would not be fair to repeat what was said but people should know that I finished that day a much happier man."



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Subsequent to the newspaper reports, Rev David Armstrong confirmed in a phone conversation on 27th December 2007, that he had been encouraged to approach Dr Paisley at a gathering in Stormont by news reporter, Eamonn Malley and by the retired Roman Catholic Bishop of Derry, Edward Daly, both saying to him that he would find Dr Paisley a very different person from what he had been.

While refusing to give details of his conversation with Dr Paisley, David Armstrong said that he spoke with him in the presence of Lady Eileen Paisley. He also said that the "Daily Mirror" report was inaccurate when it stated that Martin McGuinness was present. He repeated that as a result of what Dr Paisley said to him he went home a very happy man!