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A History of Ireland as It Relates to the Ulster Scots or, Gospel mercy over the past 1500 years

The text of a series of lectures for "The Heart of the Matter", March 2014 by Rev Ivan Foster

Irish History Part 1: Patrick

The Gospel of Christ came to Ireland over 1500 years ago. Despite many attempts by Satan and his agents God has been pleased to maintain His truth in this land.

Records of the early period of Ireland's history are scant. Much that is termed history is in fact fairy tale and myth. Amidst the fairy tales and what purports to be history are undoubted references to historical events, though distorted and exaggerated. Dr. W. D. Killen, the great Irish Presbyterian historian of the nineteenth century, wrote of the records that are available: "All existing memorials concur to prove that Western Europe was peopled from the East; and the language of the Celts, the earliest colonists, is still inscribed on the Seine and the Rhone, the Alps, and the Apennines. Ireland, where this tongue is yet spoken by a portion of the population, can produce records describing the succession of its kings extending back to a very remote antiquity; and though these documents contain many errors and absurdities, the reader may see that they often embody historical materials exaggerated or distorted in the course of transmission. According to them all, the island, at first uninhabited, was occupied by successive importations of strangers of oriental origin." {The Old Catholic Church, page 303-4}.

The religion of ancient Ireland was that of Druidism, a religion with an abundance of priests and which chiefly centred upon the worship of the sun. It had strong overtones of the Baal worship we read of in the Bible.

There are records that indicate some knowledge of the Gospel was found amongst the people shortly after the time of its entrance into England.

Early in the 4th century, Constantine the Great had professed faith in the Gospel though subsequent history showed that his conversion was not a genuine work of God's grace but rather a mere embracing of some external practices. His campaign of enforced 'conversion' or 'christianising' of the nations he conquered, clearly evidences the bogus nature of his own conversion to Christ. However, during his reign, the true message of Christ enjoyed a greater freedom. It was at this time that some say that it gained an entrance into England and thereafter it would have been carried across the sea to Ireland since there was considerable commercial traffic between the two islands.

In truth however, the gospel would have reached the British Isles early in the second century. In the 5th century, a French writer wrote of Pope Celestine sending Palladius to the 'Irish believing in Christ'. This was in AD 431. It is clear that by that date there were those who believed in Christ in Ireland.

By this time, the Bishop of Rome had already become a superior person within the framework of Christendom. Rome was the capital of Christendom. His sending of an envoy to Ireland was an attempt to increase his authority. It is also to be noted that Ireland was considered of sufficient importance as to merit an attempt to bring it under the rule of the Bishop of Rome. Palladius had previously been the Archdeacon of Rome. He is considered to have been a Briton, and being about 60, he may well have welcomed such an appointment. He set out for Ireland accompanied by many attendants and as one Roman Catholic historian would have us believe, an ample supply of 'relics'.

Palladius had little success. The 'official' story is that he was driven from Ireland by a minor chieftain and forced to flee to Scotland. He met with little success there also and about a year after commencing his task,



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died of a fever. The 'official' account goes on to say that the Pope then sent over Patrick who had great success and saw the land won for the Pope and for the Gospel.

Such an account is false.

While there is much that is mere fancy amongst the historical documents of Ireland, there are two that everyone accepts. They are the "Confession of Patrick" and his "Letter". From these we can glean certain facts, which, when coupled with other items of information that are available, give us the more likely account of what happened to Palladius and his attempt to claim Ireland for the Pope.

From Patrick's "Confession" we learn that Patrick was not in Ireland to carry out the will of the Pope. Were he sent there by Celestine, as Rome would claim, then that is one matter that Patrick would mention when giving an account of how he came to Ireland. Patrick makes no mention whatever of the Pope or of Rome or of being sent by Celestine. His call to Ireland was a simple call sent of God. His language is as straightforward on this matter as that which you would hear today in a fundamentalist meeting.

For a number of very good reasons, it is believed that Patrick died on 17th March 465. Likewise, it is believed that he laboured for 60 years in Ireland. That means he was in Ireland 25 years before Palladius arrived.

The bishop of Rome's claim of being the chief Bishop was not universally accepted. The drift away from primitive simplicity was undoubtedly on, but the gross errors that prevailed in the dark ages were only beginning to emerge and find acceptance with the people. In France, particularly in that part called then 'Britain' and from which Patrick may well have come, there was resistance to the Bishop of Rome's claims of universal jurisdiction. Consequently, it fits in with the picture of Palladius being rejected in Ireland, not by a minor chieftain, but by the converts generally, because they rejected the attempts by the Bishop of Rome to bring them under his jurisdiction.

Following its first planting the Gospel was carried by men whose hearts the Lord had touched into many neighbouring countries: Scotland, England, Wales, France, Germany, Switzerland and further. God has been pleased, in some measure, to do again in these latter days what He did in those distant days. May the land, now associated with terror and strife, become known again by the title it was then given, "The land of Saints and Scholars."

The history of the Gospel in Ireland begins, to a very real degree, with the story of Patrick. There is much written about Patrick that is entirely fictitious. We can, however, be reasonably sure concerning his faith in Christ and the doctrines that he preached. There exist today two of his writings accepted by all scholars. One is his Confession. From his Confession we learn that his father was a deacon, the son of Potitus, a gospel minister. Where Patrick was actually born is something of a mystery. England, Scotland, Wales and even France all claim to be the place of his birth. In his Confession he tells us that he came from a village called Bonavem Taberniae. Where that village was is difficult now to say. It would appear that the most likely place was somewhere in Roman Britain. Very possibly he came from a place now called Kilpatrick, that is, the 'Church of Patrick', near Dumbarton in the Firth of Clyde, in Scotland.

At the age of sixteen Patrick was taken captive by Irish raiders and sold as a slave in Ireland. Slemish mountain in Co. Antrim, in the northern part of Ireland, was where he tended the flocks of sheep of the one who became his master. Wherever he was born there is one thing we can be sure of and that is he was born again in Ireland. It was there that the wayward youth repented and sought the God of his fathers and received Christ by simple faith. After a period of slavery he managed to escape and return home. But he was not to remain there very long. For it was there, like Paul, he received a call. He had a remarkable dream in which he saw a man coming to him from Ireland, whose name was Victoricius, carrying with him letters and the letters began with the heading 'The voice of the Irish' and as he began to read one of the letters he heard a voice that cried: "We entreat thee holy youth to come and walk henceforth among us." Patrick took this to be the call of God and so returned to the land where once he had been a slave, but now he came as a preacher of the gospel to set men free from the darkness that enslaved this land.



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He had great success in the preaching of the Gospel. Many churches were started and many thousands were won to Christ. His preaching career covered a period of time in the mid-fifth century. He is believed to be buried in Downpatrick a small town in Co. Down, Northern Ireland. It is important to understand that though the Roman Catholic Church today claims him as her apostle to Ireland and his name and his statues adorn many of the great Roman Catholic mass houses in Ireland there is nothing more clear than that Patrick's theology was as far removed from Popery as Heaven is from Hell. It is a simple matter of reading his confession and one will see that Rome's claim that he came to Ireland as an emissary of the Pope is entirely false. Neither is it true to say that Patrick was responsible for organising a church in Ireland that was prelatric in its organisation. Patrick claims in his writings to have established 365 churches in Ireland appointing 365 bishops or one bishop for each church. It is clear that far from following episcopalianism Patrick followed primitive Bible Christianity or what is commonly called today Presbyterianism.

Although Ireland sank down into that same darkness that engulfed the rest of Europe during that period which became known as the Dark Ages, the decline was not as rapid as it was elsewhere. The gospel light was shining still in Ireland with remarkable clarity when it had greatly dimmed in many other European countries. From Ireland there went out many great missionary preachers. Among them was Columba who centred his activities in Iona, an island off the west coast of Scotland. Columbanus went to preach in France. Gallus one of the disciples of Columbanus, became a well known evangelist in Switzerland. Another preacher of the Gospel with Irish origins was Killen. He evangelised in the Würzburg area of Germany and in another part of Germany a work was carried on by a preacher called "Fridolin the Traveller".

Sadly, Ireland also eventually succumbed to the advancing darkness of Romanism. One event that established Rome in Ireland was the invitation of Pope Adrian IV to the English King, Henry II, to invade Ireland and bring it into submission to the English crown and thus into submission to the Pope of Rome. In the light of the present political campaign in Northern Ireland, it is essential that we bear in mind that England first became politically involved in Ireland at the invitation of the Pope. It is ironic that the very system which gives birth to anti-English feelings through its schools and churches and which in turn is responsible for the fanaticism of Roman Catholic terrorism, should have been responsible for the invasion of Ireland by the English in the first place.

When England served the cause of the Pope it was welcome in Ireland. But once England became Protestant she was labelled the wicked invader.

Such is the lying deceit of Romanism.

Irish History Part 2: From the English invasion, 1171, to the Flight of the Earls, 1607

The simple gospel message of Patrick continued to be proclaimed in Ireland, long after his death in the latter part of the 5th century, but with the spread of papal ambition, the Bishop of Rome was anxious to bring Ireland into its pale. This encroachment was opposed by Irish ecclesiastics so that for centuries it remained purer than any other country in Christendom.

But little by little it acceded to the unceasing demands of Papal Rome. However, this did not happen overnight nor without a battle of resistance.

In 1110 a synod was convened under the presidency of the Pope's Legate, Gillebert. This is known in history as the Synod of Rathbreasail. It decreed that the whole land was to be placed under the government of 23 bishops and 2 archbishops. This fact is recorded by the Roman Catholic Irish historian, John Lanigan.

Despite the authoritative character of this synod, the arrangements it decreed were not universally carried out. More than 40 years later, another Papal Legate, Cardinal Paparo, was sent over from Rome and another



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synod was convened and met at Kells in Co. Meath. Again, Ireland was divided into dioceses; this time the number was increased to 38. That the church structures brought into existence in the days of Patrick were still operating in some places in Ireland is evident in the continued parish or village bishoprics for this Kells synod passed a resolution that "on the death of village bishops . . . there should be chosen to succeed in their stead, arch-presbyters to be appointed by the diocesans, who should superintend the clergy and the laity in their respective districts."

It is clear from this that the non-prelatic system of church government instituted by Patrick fought long and died hard! The Synod of Kells had followed the Synod of Rathbreasail because, although nearly half a century had passed, the decrees of the earlier synod had not been generally carried out throughout Ireland.

But Rome was determined to have her way in Ireland. Accordingly, she resorted to the means she has so often employed - the arm of secular government. The king in England at that time was Henry II. He was a loyal vassal of Rome's Pope Adrian IV, the only Englishman ever to sit on the papal throne. His real name was Nicholas Breakspear.

In 1155, some three years after the Synod of Kells, Pope Adrian issued a bull in which he authorised Henry II to invade Ireland. The wording of the bull merits us quoting at least some of it as it appears in Dr. Thomas Hamilton's 'History of the Irish Presbyterian Church' published in 1887.

"His Holiness held it right that for the extending the borders of the Church, restraining the progress of vice, for the correction of manners, the planting of virtue, and the increase of the Christian religion, you enter that island and execute therein whatever shall pertain to the honour of God and the welfare of the land, and that the people of that land receive you honourably, and reverence you as their lord, the rights of their churches still remaining sacred and inviolate, and saving to St Peter the annual pension of one penny from every house."

This act by Pope has naturally caused much quibbling by those anxious to protect the papacy from the repercussions of the invasion of Ireland by the English army but try as they might, the defenders of Rome cannot eradicate from history the fact papal greed and ambition lay behind the interference of the English crown in Ireland's affairs and that nation being handed over most audaciously to England. Ireland has complained much ever since but few Roman Catholics are willing to recognise the true villain of the piece - Papal Rome in the form of Pope Adrian IV.

Although the papal bull was issued in 1155, it was 1171 before Henry was ready to invade. In that year he landed at Waterford and so began England's sovereignty over the island of Ireland. In truth, English authority extended little further than the area known as the 'Pale', an area on the east coast stretching from a little south of Dublin northward to Dundalk. The rest of the country was largely left to its own devices. The Romish bishops and priests enforced their rule, now having the support of the English army, and the people were made to submit to the errors of Rome and surrender what remained of the primitive gospel teachings of Patrick.

The regime of the Roman priests is exemplified by what Dr Hamilton tells us of the behaviour of three prelates in his book. "We read of one besieging a brother bishop in his own cathedral, loading him with chains, and immuring him in a dungeon from which he barely escaped with his life, — of another who earned for himself the significant nicknames of 'Burn-Bill' and 'Scorch-Villain,' from his having burned all his tenants' title-deeds, of which he had fraudulently got possession, and of a third starving to death six persons whose property he had got into his hands."

A very great change had come upon Ireland from the days of gospel blessing under Patrick. Misery prevailed across it.

What may be called the first step toward the reformation of the affairs of the nation came in 1537 when the Irish Parliament rejected the authority of the Pope and declared the King, Henry VIII, supreme head on earth of the Church of Ireland.



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But it was change in name only! No spiritual change is the outcome of parliamentary decrees or kingly proclamations. Although the spirit of true reformation was underway in England, in Ireland such announcements were seen as but the enforcement of the religious views of the invader.

Had only wiser measures been taken for the instructing of the Irish people in the Scriptures, as were being taken in England and Scotland, then the history of this island would have been very different indeed. As it was, the civil penal laws could not have endeared the Irish people to the English administration but rather ensured that the religion which had the endorsement of the same parliament which issued such harsh restrictions and penalties against the native people, would not be viewed with any favour. Little wonder then that the Reformation which strode forward on mainland Britain should make such little progress in Ireland.

The short reign of Henry VIII's son, the godly Edward VI, saw some advances but his 6-year reign from 1547-1553, was too short for the gospel to advance too far. Furthermore, he was followed by the one rightly called 'Bloody Mary', Mary I of England who reigned from 1553 until 1558 and it was indeed a time of blood for the cause of Christ. Over 280 Protestants were burned to death during her reign with many more dying in prison.

Of course, the Protestants of Ireland did not escape her hatred. She set about undoing whatever little progress had been made under Edward VI and Romanism resumed its dominance. Mary instructed the civil powers — "by their example and all good means possible, to advance the honour of God and the Catholic faith, to set forth the honour and dignity of the Pope's Holiness and the See Apostolic of Rome, and from time to time to be ready with their aid and secular force, at the request of all spiritual ministers and ordinaries, to punish and repress all heretics and Lollards, and their damnable sects, opinions and errors." (Richard Cox, History of Ireland.) The Irish Parliament passed an Act in 1556 which declared that "all persons, preaching or teaching, or evidently suspected of preaching or teaching, against the Catholic Faith" might be arrested by the bishop of the diocese, and, on their refusal to renounce their faith, be delivered to the secular arm, and "burnt for the terror of others."

Irish terrorism against Protestantism has a long history!

The story is told of one of Mary's emissaries, a Dr Cole, Dean of St Paul's in London, being dispatched with fresh orders to put down Protestantism in Ireland. He stayed overnight in Chester, near Liverpool, and being heard boasting of the royal commission he carried and its purpose by the proprietor of the inn, the good lady, out a concern for Protestant friends in Dublin, removed the royal commission from the box amongst his luggage and replaced it with a deck of playing cards. The switch was not noticed until Dr Cole sought to present the box containing the royal commission to the Lord Deputy of Ireland. What consternation ensued when the pack of card was discovered with the knave of clubs uppermost! The Dean hastened back to London for a fresh commission and was on his way back to Ireland once more when Mary died. So, by the merciful hand of providence, many Irish Protestants were spared the sufferings endured by their English counterparts.

Elizabeth I, 'Good Queen Bess' as she became known, now came to the throne. However, the swing of the pendulum could not but influence the Irish people in an evil manner. To see Romanism overturned and Protestantism established and then Protestantism put down and Romanism once again restored and now the tables turned yet again could only breed contempt for many of the ruling ecclesiastics. Those who had been zealous Romanists had become equally zealous Protestants under Henry and Edward only to now turn turtle once again under Mary's regime. Some were even so bold as to change their coats a third time when Elizabeth came to the throne. Such vacillations could bring derision only upon those guilty of it in the eyes of the native people.

It is little wonder then that rebellion and civil war marked Elizabeth's reign in Ireland. However, before she died, that rebellion had been effectively dealt with militarily. The land entered upon a period of relative calm and a measure of prosperity ensued.

With the "Flight of the Earls", the departure of the Gaelic chieftains from Ireland to seek refuge on the con-



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inent in 1607, a new day dawned in the land. Their power broken on the battlefield, they and thousands of their followers departed their native land. The turmoil that the north of the island of Ireland had long endured as the result of the defiance of these rebellious leaders was now largely at an end.

The government took steps to populate the large tracts of land that had been forfeited to the crown by the fugitive earls. The people the government chose for such a project were Scots and English settlers, many from the rough, tough border country that lay between England and Scotland. They were ideal stock to plant in the northern Province of Ulster. They could be expected to develop the natural resources of the country by their industry and enterprise in a fashion the native population had failed to do. They could also be expected to provide a faithful and loyal people ready to protect the interests of Protestantism.

The Ulster Plantation, as the enterprise became known as, proved to be one of the most significant events in the history of Ulster and Ireland and especially in the cause of Christ's gospel in this island.

Irish History Part 3: - The 1600s, Revival and Rebellion

Early in the 17th century, the Ulster Plantation began. The main agent of this project was Sir Arthur Chichester. He was appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1605.

The plantation was carried out in the following manner:— The lands that had been forfeited by the banished rebel chiefs, led by O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, and O'Donnell, Early of Tyrconnel, were now divided into lots of 1000, 1500 and 2000 acres. They were allocated to settlers conforming to certain conditions. The occupiers of the largest portions were bound within four years to build a castle and bawn. The bawn was a walled enclosure with fortified towers at the corners. Within this enclosure was the castle or dwelling house and it provided security for the occupants and their animals from the bands of marauders still blighting the country side. They were also required to plant on their estates 48 able men, 18 years old and upward, of English or Scottish descent.

Those of the second class with smaller allotments, were obligated to build within 2 years a strong stone or brick house and bawn; those of the third class, a bawn. Both these classes were bound to plant a proportionate number of British families on their possessions, and to have their houses furnished with a sufficiency of arms. Dr Reid in his 'History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland' gives greater details of the business-like arrangements underlying the plantation.

It may be said here that the experiences obtained in the plantation by the Ulster Scots, as they later became known, stood them in good stead when they emigrated to the lands that were eventually to be known as the United States of America.

It might also be said that what happened in Ulster in the early 17th century was every bit as legal and legitimate as was the planting of the vast areas of the American Colonies. Irish Republicans still term the Protestant descendants of the Planters as foreigners and invaders with no rightful claim to the lands of the northern counties where they have lived now for over 400 years. Strangely, these charges are taken up by Roman Catholic sympathisers and supporters of Irish Republicanism in the USA. It is most ironic that people like the Irish/American Kennedys and those of that ilk have no more just claim to their possessions in the United States than do the Ulster Protestants to their possessions in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the Ulster Protestant has a claim of greater legitimacy in that he has been in the land for 4 centuries!

The settlers faced harsh conditions in this wild and long neglected land which was nothing short of a wilderness. Wolves and the sudden, silent arrow fired from the bow of an Irish native served to remind the settler that he was in an inhospitable land. However, diligent labours soon saw trees felled, houses built, fields ploughed and planted and crops harvested and animal husbandry organised.

The settlers held their ground against the adversities they faced and soon the plantation areas were trans-



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formed from the wastelands they had been and took on the appearance of the more organised lands from which they moved across the 20-mile narrow North Channel.

Settlements such as Londonderry, Coleraine, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Belfast, Newtownards, Bangor, Donaghadee, Killyleagh and many others were established or further developed from primitive hamlets. Belfast, now the capital city of Northern Ireland, was a mere handful of fishermen's huts before the Plantation but soon became the beginnings of the flourishing port that it is today.

Ulster became a place of refuge for those faithful Christians who followed in the footsteps of the Scots Reformer, John Knox, who died in 1572. Attempts were being made by James VI of Scotland to reintroduce Prelacy and overthrow Presbyterianism. He had, at the start of his reign, as is the case with so many kings and rulers, professed the strongest allegiance to the gospel and to Presbyterianism. However, the Lord has not said, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help," (Psalm 146:3) without good cause!

James desired a more malleable church than that of the stiff-backed Presbyterians. He had succeeded to the English throne in 1603 following the death of Queen Elizabeth. His true nature was seen in his threat to the Puritans of England: "I'll make them conform or I'll harry them out of the land." This boded ill for both Scotland and England.

Andrew Melville, Knox's bold successor was committed to the Tower of London for a period of 4 years and Prelacy was imposed upon Scotland. The persecution of Presbyterians continued on the ascension of Charles I to the throne. Archbishop Laud was the chief instrument of the King to oppress God's people. It was in these circumstances that refugees from this persecution sought safety in Ulster. In the wise providence of God, Scotland's loss was Ulster's great gain.

While Presbyterianism existed in Ireland from long before the Ulster Plantation, nevertheless, it is a fact that Presbyterianism took a firm root and its present structures grew during the period of the Plantation. In 1613, Edward Brice began his ministry in Broadisland, which lies between Carrickfergus and Larne in Co Antrim. He had been the minister in Drymen, Stirlingshire but had to flee his native land because of his opposition to prelacy. The Bishop of Down took a sympathetic view of men such as Brice and permitted him to exercise his ministry. Such sympathy was in a large part due to the influence of James Ussher, the Primate of the Church of Ireland who had pronounced Presbyterian doctrinal affinities. Under him the Church of Ireland adopted in 1615, "Articles of Religion" which were thoroughly Calvinistic and made no mention of the three orders of 'bishops, priests and deacons', so beloved of Episcopalians.

Another refugee was a Mr Hubbard, an English nonconformist forced to flee from London. He preached at Carrickfergus from about 1621 but, sadly, died at the beginning of 1623. He was greatly beloved of his people.

One of the most able of the men to come to Ulster to promote the Presbyterian cause was Robert Blair. He had been a professor in Glasgow College but forced to flee because of his refusal of prelacy. He became minister of Bangor in 1623. James Hamilton, a nephew of Lord Clandeboy, became minister of Ballywalter in 1625. In Hollywood, Robert Cunningham had taken up the ministry of the gospel. Josias Welsh, grandson of John Knox, had settled at Templepatrick just 6 miles north east of Newtownabbey. John Livingstone became minister at Killinchy in Co. Down.

These are but a few of the godly men who by the mercy of God were brought over to Ulster and under Him were instruments in the saving of souls and the advance of the cause of Christ, becoming the fathers of Presbyterianism in Ireland.

The river Sixmilewater rises in the hills above Larne in Co. Antrim and flows toward Ballynure, Ballyclare, Templepatrick and empties into Lough Neagh. It is a river that has long been associated with a wonderful work of grace amongst the early planters and their ministers.



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Rev James Glendinning was minister at Carrickfergus. He was a good man according to his contemporaries but not over-gifted in the pulpit. He was advised by Rev Robert Blair, who used to cross Belfast Lough to assist him, to leave Carrickfergus, then the leading town in Ulster, and seek a more isolated country charge, better suited to his capabilities. This he did, moving to Oldstone, not far from the town of Antrim. The poor man was later described as becoming "distracted" or what we would likely today refer to as suffering from depression.

Yet this was the man who was to become God's instrument in a great work of revival! Truly it is "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts," Zechariah 4:6.

At Oldstone, his preaching greatly awakened the consciences of many in his district for he had preached strongly the terrors of God's judgments against the "lewdness and ungodly sinfulness of the people." The people of the parish fell into a state of anxiety and distress of soul, but poor Mr Glendinning was not skilled at applying the medicine of the gospel. Multitudes were thus stricken down and it was only when neighbouring ministers came to his aid, in response to his requests, that souls were led to find rest and pardon in Christ. Meetings to preach the gospel and instruct inquirers were organised and the work of revival spread to neighbouring areas and undoubtedly multitudes were converted to Christ. It was called at the time, "a bright and hot sun-blink of the gospel."

But the sky was soon to darken. The prevailing attitude throughout Britain and Ireland at this time was anti-non-conformity and things continued to be difficult for the cause of Christ in Ulster.

But, the devil had worse in store for Christ's flock; that was the terrible Roman Catholic rebellion of 1641. The objective of the Roman Catholic rebels was the eradication of all Protestants in Ireland and the restoration of the lands that had been forfeited a generation earlier. The rebellion began on Saturday 23 October 1641. It began with an attempt to seize Dublin Castle, the seat of the British administration but was frustrated. However, the force of the rebellion moved northward and spent itself in Ulster. Dungannon, Newry, Monaghan, Dromore in Co. Down and many other towns were seized by the Roman Catholic forces of Sir Phelim O'Neill, the rebel leader. Enniskillen, the chief town of Co. Fermanagh was safeguarded against the rebels and was able to forward information to Londonderry, Limavady and Coleraine which saved these towns also. Carrickfergus, Lisburn and Belfast were also secured against the rebels. However, outside these strongholds, Ulster became a veritable field of blood. Whole Protestant families, including infants, were slaughtered. Others stripped naked perished behind hedges seeking what shelter they could find in one of the coldest winters that could be remembered. The river Blackwater in Co. Tyrone ran red with the blood of the slaughtered as the Roman Catholic insurgents vent their hatred upon their Protestant neighbours.

Infants had their brains dashed out before their horrified mothers; others were flung alive into boiling pots of water or fed alive to pigs. Poor Protestants had their eyes gouged out, their hands or their ears cut off. Three hundred Protestant men, women and children were driven into a church at Loughgall and then, daily, victims were taken out to suffer outrage and be killed. 196 Protestants were drowned at Portadown Bridge in one day. 1000 were said to be killed in the same manner at that location. The worst of atrocities were reserved for Protestant ministers. Rev Thomas Murray of Killyleagh was crucified and his two sons cut to pieces before their mother's eyes before she was horribly mutilated and her tongue half cut out.

The full details of the savagery performed upon Protestant children, women and men by these adherents of Roman Catholicism, who were commonly anointed by their priests and bishops before engaging in such devilry, are too distressing to relate. Suffice to say that full documentation of the wickedness of that Roman Catholic rebellion remains to this day. This is no hearsay. 32 volumes of sworn dispositions still exist in the library of Trinity College, Dublin and can be accessed by the internet. All told, it was believed that many tens of thousands of Protestants were slaughtered. Indeed, there were those of highest authority who estimated the death toll as high as hundreds of thousands.

The 1641 rebellion was Ulster's "St Bartholomew's massacre." It has left a deep-seated dread of popery amongst Ulster Protestants. It stirred our fathers in 1912 to arm themselves in order to resist the British



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government's "Home Rule Bill" which would have placed Ulster under Dublin and Roman Catholic rule. It was a sentiment which gave birth to Northern Ireland remaining British while the rest of Ireland opted to leave the United Kingdom.

Here in Ulster, we continue to say: "God save us from Popery!" May the Lord in mercy hear that prayer.

Irish History Part 4: The Commonwealth, the Restoration of the Monarchy and the Glorious Revolution

While Ireland's Protestantism reeled under the terrible aftermath of the Roman Catholic-inspired Rebellion of 1641, in England, the result of the Civil War, which stretched from 1642 to 1651 through its various stages, was the short-lived "Commonwealth of England" (1649-53) under Oliver Cromwell. He has been much maligned but that man of God most certainly did much to bring in Parliamentary Democracy to the United Kingdom. The "Commonwealth" was replaced by the "Protectorate" (1653-59) which was, in fact, personal rule by Oliver Cromwell.

It was in this historic epoch that "The Solemn League and Covenant" between England and Scotland was agreed upon in 1643. It committed both countries to the maintenance of the Reformed religion in Scotland and the reformation of religion in England and Ireland according to the Word of God. It also set forth the "extirpation of Popery, Prelacy" and "whatever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness."

It was a most momentous document and most surely be seen as an apex in the development of national religion in the British Isles.

As well as introducing Parliamentary Democracy to the United Kingdom, Oliver Cromwell brought relief to the suffering Protestant people of Ireland by his armed intervention. Ireland had known nothing but war since the rebellion of 1641, with most of the island controlled by the Irish Confederates. These "Confederates" had entered an alliance with English Royalists, loyal to the Stuart monarchy, because they felt increasingly threatened by the armies of the English Parliament after Charles I's arrest in 1648. The Confederates signed a treaty of alliance with the English Royalists and the joint Royalist and Confederate forces under the Duke of Ormonde attempted to eliminate the Parliamentary army holding Dublin, but they were routed at the Battle of Rathmines, on the outskirts of Dublin, on 2 August 1649.

Cromwell naturally had an affinity with the suffering Protestants of Ireland and landed at Dublin on 15 August 1649 with an army to quell the armed resistance of the Royalist/Irish Rebel alliance in Ireland.

Cromwell's suppression of the Rebels and Royalists during 1649 evokes strong reactions still amongst Roman Catholics in Ireland and that because of the actions of the English army at Drogheda in September 1649. The putting to death of nearly 3,500 people — comprising around 2,700 Royalist soldiers, mostly Englishmen and 700 others, including civilians, prisoners, and Roman Catholic priests all of whom were claimed to be carrying arms and therefore, armed insurrectionists — followed the customary warning that if the city did not surrender then all would suffer death. Such were the terms of war in the 17th century and indeed we have seen such a rule apply within living memory during the second World War. The refusal of Germany to submit to the terms of unconditional surrender resulted in the death of many thousands of civilians at the hand of the allies. Drogheda was no more than that but on a very much smaller scale.

The Parliamentarian conquest of Ireland ground on for another four years until 1653, when the last Irish Confederate and Royalist troops surrendered. The victors confiscated almost all Irish Roman Catholic-owned land in the wake of the conquest and distributed it to the Parliament's creditors, to the Parliamentary soldiers who served in Ireland, and to English people who had settled there before the war. Such are the consequences of war then and now!!



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In the wise providence of God, the "Protectorate" did not last long and was overthrown shortly after Cromwell's death in September 1658. Political chaos followed. His successor as Lord Protector, his son Richard, was not able to manage the Parliament he summoned in January 1659 or the Army leaders on whose support he relied. He was forced to resign, and thereby to abolish the Protectorate in May 1659. In the end, the people had enough of military rule, and were calling for a new Parliament. The assurances of Charles II, the late king's exiled heir, that he would submit to any settlement decided by Parliament, convinced the political leadership in May 1660 to invite Charles II to return to claim his father's throne. Whatever hopes some might have had for peace and tranquillity in the nation were doomed. The Parliaments of Charles II and his brother James were soon to be as turbulent as those of their father!

Under Charles II and later James II, it was soon evident that whatever had changed, the gospel-hating heart of the Stuart royal family had not! Charles II's profession of regard for Presbyterianism was soon forgotten. Prelacy was re-instated and bishops appointed in Irish dioceses. Meetings of Presbytery were prohibited and troops of calvary were sent to scatter any attempts to hold them. In Ballymena, troops broke up an attempt to convene a meeting of Synod. Moreover, Presbyterian ministers had to submit to the Prayer Book and conform to prelacy or be turned out of their homes. The famed Jeremy Taylor, Bishop of Down and Connor, was to the fore in this persecution. Ministers were ejected from their pulpits and forbidden under heavy penalties to preach. It is to their honour that only 7 ministers were prepared to seek immunity from such penalties, whereas 61 made their choice to suffer rather than sacrifice the truth of God. This happened in 1661. A similar persecuting spirit swept Scotland and England although not until the next year, 1662, when in England, 2500 ministers were ejected from the Church of England for nonconformity. The 19th century Bishop of Liverpool, J. C. Ryle, referred to this Ejection as an "injury to the cause of true religion in England which will probably never be repaired". How wise those words were! When the Protestant populations of England and Ireland are compared at this time, the bold faithfulness of 61 Presbyterians compares most favourably with that of their 2500 English counterparts.

Congregations in Bangor, Newtownards, Portaferry, Comber, Castlereagh, Killinchy, Saintfield, Dromore, Rathfriland, Omagh and many many other places lost their ministers. The spirit of Jenny Geddes of Edinburgh was at work at this time, for the Episcopalian successor of the ousted Presbyterian minister was pulled from his pulpit in Comber, Co. Down, by some womenfolk and his surplice torn to pieces. They were tried at the next sitting of Downpatrick Assizes for the offence but showed no compunction for acting so! If it is not too late for me to say it: "Well done, ladies!"

In Scotland, of course, the Covenanter movement, based largely in the south west of the country, was harried by the government forces of Kings Charles II and later by those James II. It is an important episode in the martyrology of the Church of Scotland.

As in Ireland, for there was a close parallel, episcopacy was reintroduced into the Church of Scotland, and Presbyterian Church ministers were confronted with a stark choice: accept the new situation or lose their livings. Although most conformed, up to a third of the ministry refused. Some of the ministers also took to preaching in the open fields in conventicles, often attracting thousands of worshippers. Among other objections, these ministers would not take the Oath of Supremacy because they could not in, conscience, allow any king or head of the Church but Jesus Christ.

For both Ireland and Scotland and England, the closing years of the 17th century were years of toil, hardship and blood. But the Lord, as He heard the cry of Israel under the lash of the Egyptians, heard the cries of His people in the three kingdoms. "And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows," Exodus 3:7.

In a wonderfully reminiscent way, for the Lord's ways change not, God wrought deliverance in the British Isles and the site of the decisive events was Ireland.

King Charles II died in 1685 and surely his death must have caused many to hope that a change would ensue for the poor suffering saints of Christ's Kirk. But it was not to be. Charles' brother, James II, was not



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long in possession of the Sceptre until he showed that he was intent upon Romanising the national religion of England, Scotland and Ireland. In Ireland in particular, James' Romanising steps were seen. The supreme authority was placed in the hands of Lord Tyrconnell, or "Lying Dick Talbot" as he was colloquially known. Protestant judges were deposed and replaced by Romanists. The Irish Army was Romanised, Protestant officers and soldiers ousted. The Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General offices were filled by Romanists. This and many other such changes heralded the deepening darkness that Romanist ascendancy would bring.

But Providence took a hand. An anonymous letter, addressed to the Earl of Mount-Alexander, who lived near Comber in Co. Down, was found lying in the street of Comber one day in December 1688. On being taken to the Earl and read by him it was discovered to be an ill-written letter, warning that a general massacre of Protestants was planned for December 9th. Copies of the letter were circulated throughout Ulster and further afield. One such letter arrived at Londonderry on December 7th. By a curious coincidence, news of the approach of a regiment of Roman Catholic soldiers under the command of Lord Antrim, had also arrived. The 9th December was but two days away. What was to be done?? Discussions were still taking place when the alarm was sounded that the regiment was approaching and that 2 officers were at the gates of the city demanding entrance.

Rev James Gordon, of Glendermot Presbyterian Church was in the city and he gave his opinion: "Shut the gates and keep them out!" The Episcopalian bishop, Ezekiel Hopkins was, as might be expected, of another mind. "They were the king's men and the king must be obeyed."

However, God has His men in such an hour when lesser men debate and dally. Eight or nine apprentices took it upon themselves to run to the gates and shut and lock them in the face of the regiment and raise the drawbridge. In all, thirteen apprentices engaged in this defiant act which proved to be the salvation of Protestantism in not only Ireland but in England and Scotland as well. Rev James Gordon's bold advice had been taken.

The ensuing siege, which did not begin in earnest until April 18th, 1689, lasted until 28th July 1689. The city had endured a siege of some 105 days in which it is estimated that 8000 of the population of 30,000 died.

The persecution of Protestantism ended with the accession of William II. The decisive battle that settled the throne of England Scotland and Ireland and the spiritual destiny of the land for centuries through the ensuing Bill Of Rights, was fought out between King William III and King James II on the banks of the River Boyne on July 1st 1690. William was victorious and James fled.

There can be no doubt that the bravery and the fidelity of the Protestant people of Ireland and Ulster, in particular, played a major part in that wonderful deliverance for the United Kingdom.

Little wonder the cries that echo back to the 'Maiden City' of Londonderry and the Boyne - "No Surrender" and "Remember 1690" are still heard on the lips of those who bless God for His mercies to our forefathers in times long ago.

Irish History Part 5: Distress, Decline, Deadness and Disorder

The 17th century had been one of great turbulence and upheaval throughout the whole of the British Isles, nowhere more so than Ireland. The 18th century was to be characterised by a calmer appearance though an evil force was at work no less destructive, indeed maybe much more so, than persecution, war and violence.

In the early part of the 1700s, evangelicalism flourished and records show that in Ulster, still sparsely inhabited, yet on the Lord's Day congregations of 600-700 could be seen assembling for worship in Presbyterian churches. A Presbyterian minister, Rev Richard Choppin of Dublin, while on a visit to Londonderry, wrote to a friend speaking of the large Sabbath gatherings in the north-west of the Province.



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It was not so in the Episcopalian churches. There small handfuls of people gathered, often times as small as 6-7 people. It was little wonder that Episcopacy harboured deep resentment against Presbyterianism in such circumstances. Sadly, for all too many Episcopalians, it was not a matter of finding out why Presbyterianism flourished and steps being taken in order to share in this blessing, but rather it was a matter of continuing to try to suppress the advance of gospel blessing.

At that time, all Presbyterian students were trained in Glasgow. One thing that was insisted upon was the signing of the Westminster Confession of Faith before any young man could be licensed to preach, under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church. The orthodoxy of the church was something to be guarded well. However, in 1703, the first signs of a baleful heresy manifested itself. Rev Thomas Emlyn of Wood Street Presbyterian Church in Dublin, was deposed for Arianism. Arianism had its origins in the teaching of Arius, an Egyptian who lived from AD 250-336. He taught that Christ the Son of God did not always exist, but was created by God, and is therefore distinct from and a subordinate entity to God the Father. Arius was pronounced a heretic.

This wicked attack upon the person of Christ was to feature large, later in the century, and indeed in the following century, and cause much harm to the cause of Christ and trouble and grief within the ranks of Presbyterians.

The domineering position of Episcopacy ensured that the ongoing malign hatred of nonconformity by the bishops and archbishops in England and Ireland would manifest itself within the civil administration of the kingdoms. In Ireland in 1704, there was introduced the Test Act. William of Orange had died in 1702 and his wife's sister, Anne, was on the throne. She favoured Episcopacy. The Test Act required that anyone holding a public appointment must take communion in an Episcopal church within three months after their appointment or lose their office. It was believed by those who engineered the Act that many would forsake Presbyterianism and join the Episcopal church in order to safeguard their careers. It was a particularly cruel law, given the service that Presbyterians had given in Ireland in order to bring about the ascension of William and Mary to the throne.

Whatever hopes Episcopacy had of strengthening its ranks by this means, were soon disappointed for the allegiance of those who had come through such trials of fire and sword, but a short time before, was not so weak as to be swayed by financial considerations. Despite the loss of status and money that this law threatened, and the many whispered temptations men faced, that generation of Presbyterians provides us today with a lesson in faithfulness. Despite the dire consequences of refusal, refusal was chosen by many Presbyterians rather than the selling of the gospel heritage for a mess of pottage.

In Londonderry there 12 were aldermen of which 10 were Presbyterians. Those 10 were turned out of office. Of the 24 burgesses of that city, 14 were Presbyterian and they likewise were deposed. Some of these men were those who fought in the Siege of Derry for the preservation of the British crown just some 15 years earlier! In Belfast, of the 13 burgesses, 9 were Presbyterians and they were evicted from office. And so it was all over the country. Presbyterian magistrates were turned off the bench, postmasters and postmistresses were removed from the post office. Presbyterian town councillors were removed from office. The whole process was so outrageous that Daniel Defoe, the famous 18th century writer, took up his pen to protest against the treatment of Protestants in Ireland.

During Anne's reign, Irish Presbyterians were pressed under the feet of Episcopacy. It was made punishable for a Presbyterian to even teach in a school. Landlords were encouraged to refuse them as tenants or, if accepted, to charge them higher rents. Church lands had the strictest clauses that no Presbyterian churches could be erected upon them or Presbyterian farmers lease them. To this day, in the town where my mother was born, Maguiresbridge, the Presbyterian church stands outside the boundaries of the town for this very reason. Episcopalian penmen, such as Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's Dublin - he of "Gulliver's Travels" fame - poured forth their scorn upon this worthy people.

It became difficult for Presbyterians to even meet for worship and many were the legal difficulties set in



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their path. Two ministers, Rev James Fleming and Rev William Biggar were sent to prison as a result of this opposition though the Lord Justices intervened and had them released. In Belturbet, Co. Cavan, local Presbyterians set about erecting a new church building and the Presbytery of the area met to confer with them on the matter. The Episcopalian minister had the members of Presbytery arrested on a charge of holding an unlawful and riotous assembly! Despite the absurdity of the charge, they were found guilty at the next Cavan Assizes and to pacify their persecutors, they had to promise not to build a church within a mile of Belturbet. In Antrim, Downpatrick and Rathfriland, the doors of the Presbyterian churches were nailed up so that no services could be held.

It was not the fault of Episcopalianism in the days of Queen Anne that the gospel witness of the Presbyterian Church was not eradicated from the land.

Despite it all, Presbyterianism held its ground and, indeed, progressed. It comprised 140 congregations under 11 Presbyteries. In 1710, The Synod of Ulster, a meeting comprising representatives from all the Presbyteries in Ulster, formed a plan for the preaching of the gospel in the Irish tongue. Bibles, Catechisms and copies of the Confession of Faith were prepared in Irish for distribution. Despite their own troubles, Presbyterians had a burden for the souls of others.

George I came to the throne in 1714 and under his reign things improved for Presbyterians. In 1719 the Toleration Act was passed, despite the stern opposition of the bishops, exempting Presbyterians from the penalties to which before they had been liable. However, the Test Act remained in power.

As mentioned earlier, a leaven had appeared within the ranks of Presbyterianism. In 1705, the "Clerical Club" was formed for the purpose of discussing theological topics. Woe unto ministers when they consider they have nothing better to do than to meet together to "discuss"!! Christ sent forth His servants to preach the gospel to the lost, not meet together to gossip!

A leader amongst these clerics was Rev John Abernethy of Antrim. The club was called "The Belfast Society". It grew to be influential but it was an influence for evil. Its meetings became the fountainhead of erroneous doctrine. These doctrines soon were termed as "New Light". As ever, when there arises "New Light" in opposition to the "True Light", the new is soon revealed as the "Old Darkness" of the devil's lie. Isaiah stated the matter well. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Isaiah 8:20. There was no light in the pronouncements of the "The Belfast Society" whatever.

In 1719, Rev Abernethy preached a sermon which was entitled: Religious Obedience founded on Personal Persuasion. It gave rise to a controversy which gripped the whole Presbyterian Church. It was really an attempt to stop the requirement that all must sign the Westminster Confession of Faith before being licensed as ministers for the Presbyterian Church. In 1720, an act was passed by the General Synod called the "Pacific Act". It was an attempt to bring peace. It permitted those who had any scruples about signing the Confession because of objections to certain parts or phrases to substitute their own wording. Like most compromises it failed miserably. It became a door through which those of heretical views entered the pulpits of Presbyterianism. Under the compromise, Rev Samuel Halliday was installed in Belfast, in July of that year, even though he altogether refused to sign the Confession of Faith in any form. Four members of the Presbytery conducting the installation objected to it proceeding but they were over-ruled. At a meeting of the sub-Synod of Belfast in January 1721, the members of the Presbytery who installed Halliday were publicly rebuked after a debate which lasted from Tuesday until Friday at 4.00 am. The depths to which the malady had grown can be seen in the fact that the Presbytery refused the rebuke and refused likewise to sign the Confession of faith. No steps were taken to deal with this rebellious attitude. Mr Halliday had been in England during this debate but upon his return, the members of Presbytery who had protested against his installation attempted to have him sign the Confession. Again he refused and the Presbytery was hastily adjourned before any formal decision could be arrived at.

At the annual General Synod there were some 17 petitions asking that "all members of the Synod" subscribe



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the Westminster Confession of faith as a confession of their faith." Happy for the church had it accepted these petitions, but instead compromise won the day. Now instead of subscription of the Confession being mandatory it became permissible! Thus apostasy enters and advances when no resolute action is taken to cut it out.

One measure adopted to remedy the constant debates in the annual Synods and bring about a degree of peace was the placing of all the non-subscribing ministers into one Presbytery - the Presbytery of Antrim. This was decided in 1725. A year later, another decision of Synod resulted in the refusing of any fellowship or communion with the Presbytery of Antrim, a decision it must be said that was brought about chiefly by the votes of the elders present. However, such a partial separation as this could never heal the church thus infected with error.

It was to be another 100 years before a full and complete separation from the errors of Unitarianism was to be accomplished.

Two other notable events took place in the 18th century. One was the rising tide of emigration of Ulster Presbyterians to the United States of America where they became known as 'Ulster Scots'. Rev Francis Makemie went to America about 1681 and he proved to be the vanguard of a flood of fellow-Presbyterians that reached its full tide in after the first quarter of the 18th century. From about 1729, it is reckoned that 12,000 people annually left Ulster for the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. There awaited them there the Presbyterian Church which Francis Makemie had planted toward the close of the 1600s. It has been claimed that it was a colony of Ulstermen in Mecklenburg County that signed a declaration of independence in May 20, 1775, before Thomas Jefferson produced it in writing in Philadelphia.

It was little wonder that deadness ensued. The drain of godly people plus the workings of the plague of falsehood and error had to have its impact upon the spirituality of Ulster. When the people of God are hampered and crippled by the presence of error within their ranks, they are like Samson with his hair shorn and his eyes put out. Little wonder also that evil should flourish in such circumstances. Not surprisingly, the old spirit of rebellion and slaughter arose again amongst the Roman Catholic population. The link between spiritual lawlessness and civil lawlessness can be clearly seen at this time in Ireland's affairs. An alliance sprang up between Unitarianism and bloody revolution which is boasted of still today by Irish Republicans such as Sinn Fein.

Doubtless, the spirit of revolution in France, stirred such thoughts and gave rise to the "Society of United Irishmen." In 1798 insurrection broke out and irrespective of the high sounding ideals that many pontificated, it was soon clear that the murderous spirit of 1641 had awoken once again. Some Presbyterians, imbued with the doctrines of Unitarianism and doubtless provoked by the long years of hardship endured under Episcopalian-induced civil restrictions, sided with the rebels and there were notable Unitarians amongst the leadership. Rev James Porter of Greyabbey, an Arian, was executed for treason. Rev William Steel Dickson of Portaferry, also of the "New Light" party, was imprisoned for 3 years at Fort George in Scotland. In all only 8 ministers of the Synod which comprised about 200, were convicted of any complicity in the rebellion.

The rebellion witnessed terrible atrocities against the Protestant people in the south west of Ireland. The name of 'Father' Murphy of Boolavogue will ever live amongst the list of monsters of cruelty that Roman Catholicism has produced. Protestants were gathered together by this brutish priest and his followers to a camp that they had established at Vinegar Hill. Holy water was liberally sprinkled on those that engaged in the mass murder there. To a barn in Scullabogue, 184 Protestants, mostly old men, women and children were driven. One by one they were taken out and butchered. When this proved to be too slow a process, the barn was set on fire and the remaining victims burned to death. It is recorded that a little child tried to escape the flames by crawling under the door but a brute drove his pike into the child and as a farm would toss a sheaf of corn, the little one was pitched into the flames.

So another century, this one marked by persecution, error, deadness, emigration and finally brutal rebellion, drew to a close in Ireland.



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Irish History Part 6: The 19th Century

The beginning of the 19th century brought a most welcome change in the spiritual condition of Ulster. The dreadful malady of Arianism persisted and that was seen in 1810 when a Presbyterian minister boldly proclaimed himself to be a proponent of that wicked heresy. No action was taken by the Synod though 17 ministers protested against this tolerance of error by the Synod and signed their names to the protest in its minutes. The protest was a harbinger of a coming battle which would rid the Presbyterian church of the curse of this error.

Another hopeful sign was an increasing interest in missionary outreach. A plea was made for the London Missionary Society and was heard at a meeting of the Synod in Cookstown in 1812, though it will surprise today's believer to learn that some leading ministers objected to the appeal on the grounds that attempts to win the heathen to Christ was "absurd and visionary"!

However, other ministers supported the appeal strenuously and the pulpits of the Synod were opened to Dr Waugh of London who was pleading this cause of missionary endeavour.

Presbyterian students, who up until this time had been trained in Glasgow, began to turn to a new educational institution established in Belfast, the Academical Institution. It was supported by the Presbyterian Church as well as the Seceders, who had come over to Ulster from Scotland in the mid-1700s. Their secession from the Church of Scotland arose over the reimposing of lay patronage in that church by an Act of Parliament. This act restored a right to local aristocrats virtually to impose a man of their choice upon a congregation, irrespective of the views of the members. By this means, the growing lobby of "moderatism" advanced their influence. The blight of "moderatism" was well defined by Thomas Chalmers, who was to become the great leader of the Free Church of Scotland. He depicted the period as 'the dark night of the Church of Scotland'. He described a moderate sermon in this manner: "A moderate sermon is like a winter's day: short, clear, and cold. The brevity is good, the clarity is better, but the coldness is fatal." "And", said Chalmers, "moonlight preaching ripens no harvest." The moderates abhorred religious enthusiasm. Instead they craved popularity with the upper classes of society. They chose the Church as their profession, because it offered them security of position, and a reasonable income, and some of them were not averse to acting on the stage.

Ministers of this character began to be imposed under the new Parliamentary Act upon congregations who preferred men who preached the old gospel message. Things came to a head in 1732 when the famous Ebenezer Erskine preached a sermon before the Synod of Stirling in which he called for reform in the church. For this he was deposed. Three ministers who stood with him in his protest were treated in the same manner. Thus began the Seceders' witness in Scotland. These men loved the old gospel doctrines and were willing to suffer for them.

At that time in Ulster, the error of Arianism and the shameful tolerance of error akin to Scottish 'Moderatism' were on the rise. There were those in Ulster who looked to the Seceders for a remedy. The first Seceders' congregation came into being in Lylehill, near Templepatrick in Co. Antrim, in the mid-1740s.

The witness of the Seceders grew and their numbers increased and their sharing in the running of the Belfast "Academical Institution" was an indication of their standing and influence. Two notable men were amongst those appointed as professors. The Presbyterian Church appointed Rev Samuel Hanna and the Seceders appointed Rev Samuel Edgar. Sadly, despite the presence of these two good men, the Institution became the centre of Arian influence and that in turn led on to the final conflict in the Synod of Ulster between Orthodoxy and Arianism which resulted in the overthrowing of this evil malady and its banishment from the Presbyterian Church. That battle took place in 1829 in Lurgan at a meeting of Synod. There Arianism within the Presbyterian Church of Ireland received its death blow at the hands of a truly great man, Henry Cooke. But we will come back to that battle later.

Let us first consider a little of the life of this man who played such a vital part in the history of the gospel in



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Ireland.

Henry Cooke was born on May 11th, 1788, in the townland of Grillagh, near the town of Maghera in Co. Londonderry. He was of humble farming stock and enjoyed a rather primitive early schooling but he still was able to enter Glasgow College when he was 14 years old. In 1808 he graduated and was ordained as an assistant minister in Duneane near Randalstown, Co Antrim. In 1811, he accept a call to Donegore near Templepatrick and remained there for seven years. He was a diligent pastor who also gave himself to the study of the theological issues of the day. He also gained a reputation as an orator of unusual power. In 1818, at the age of 30, he was called to Killeagh on the Co. Down coast. He was there but three years when an English minister, Rev J Smedhurst, was brought over by the 'New Light' party to help strengthen and revive its struggling cause, for it was feeling the impact of a growing evangelical spirit at that time. Smedhurst was brought to Killyleagh and Henry Cooke attended his meeting. At the end of the meeting, Cooke invited the whole gathering to attend his church the following Sabbath where, he said, he would refute every dogma Smedhurst had proclaimed.

Naturally, the following Sabbath a great multitude crowded into Henry Cooke's church. There Henry Cooke tore to shreds the Arian arguments of Smedhurst. Furthermore, Cooke announced that he planned to follow Smedhurst to every town and village where he planned to speak, and there again refute anything he said.

So began a notable chase as Henry Cooke doggedly pursued the apostle of Arianism around Ulster. In the end, the leaders of the 'New Light' party saw that Smedhurst's lectures were doing more harm to their cause than good and so he was dispatched back to England never to return.

These events surrounding Medhurst's lectures served to bring the Arian controversy right to the front of the minds of Christians in Ulster. For some seven years Henry Cooke persisted at every annual meeting of the Synod to battle for the truth of God. In 1828, at a Synod meeting in Newry, Co Down, Henry Cooke raised the issue of the Arian influence being exerted in the Belfast Academical Institution. He was almost alone in his stand. How his position reflects the loneliness of God's men in former and subsequent ages! Standing for and with the Saviour has never been a popular cause.

On that occasion he is recorded as saying: "I seem to stand alone. Yet I am not alone. Men may draw back in fear, but God and truth are with me."

Soon he was proved right!

The champion of Arianism at this time was Dr Montgomery of Dunmurry, a village just outside Belfast. He was also the head master of the English Department in the Belfast Academical Intuition. He was a most able public speaker and a formidable opponent. One of the confrontations between the two men took place at the Strabane Synod in 1827. A debate had taken place on a motion moved by Henry Cooke that every member of the Synod present should be called upon to state whether or not they believed the answer to the 6th question of the Shorter Catechism: "How many persons are there in the Godhead?" The answer given is: "There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory."

The debate that followed lasted from Thursday until Saturday and during it Henry Cooke gave one of his most splendid speeches. He was ably supported by Dr Stewart of Broughshane. Dr Montgomery, the Arian advocate gave a speech which was technically brilliant but because it was theologically flawed, was demolished by Cooke and Stewart.

The motion was carried overwhelmingly. Of those present 117 ministers and 18 elders affirmed their belief in the Trinity. However, 2 ministers declared their disbelief and 8 declined to answer.

The following year, 1828, the issue came to a head. Henry Cooke pushed for the establishment of a committee that would examine all candidates for the ministry with a view to excluding any who held to Arian or other unsound views. This resulted in another confrontation between Cooke and Montgomery but Cooke's



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overtures were carried by a large majority, 139 for with 57 against.

The Arians within the Belfast Academical Institution knew they faced gradual extinction by virtue of the committee voted into existence by the Synod, so they prepared a "Remonstrance" protesting against the measure. This was to be presented to the next annual meeting of the Synod.

This gathering was eagerly anticipated. It took place in Lurgan. Dr Montgomery had many months to prepare for the meeting and he spoke very powerfully for nearly three hours, displaying all the skills and arts of the orator. Indeed, his speech was so impressive that even the closest friends and supporters of Dr Cooke trembled for him, almost despairing of him being able to answer. After an adjournment of 30 minutes and without any further opportunity to prepare a response to the many charges laid against him, Dr Cooke stood to his feet and gave what is considered one of the greatest displays of oratory ever heard in Ireland. It heralded the death of Arianism within the Presbyterian Church in that day and resulted in the withdrawal of the proponents of that evil doctrine from the Synod the following year. The final link in the chain which bound Irish Presbyterianism to orthodoxy took place in 1835 when it was proposed that subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith become requisite for all licentiates, elders and ministers. This law was confirmed in 1836.

There can be no doubt that this work of purging under the leadership of Dr Henry Cooke became the precursor of the glorious 1859 revival that swept through Ulster, the glowing embers of which are still being experienced in this land today. The Province of Ulster, with its strong Presbyterian presence was shaken by the hand of God in a most wonderful way. The ingathering of souls was apostolic. It is reckoned that up to 100,000 souls came under the influence of divine grace in that day of blessing, most of whom became affiliated to the Presbyterian Church. The moral, civic and above all, the spiritual life of the land was changed and still shows the remnants of that change to this day.

Despite the unceasing efforts of ecumenism and Romanism within the once great Presbyterian church, the Methodist and the Episcopalian denominations over the last 50 years, the flame of the gospel still burns brightly in Ulster though on a lesser scale.

May the God of 1859 enable it to continue burning until our blessed Saviour returns in glory.

We must learn the lesson of the truth that is set forth in Hosea 10:12, a verse that has featured so many times in sermons, in earlier years, in Free Presbyterian Churches. "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." I can well recall that verse being preached in a little mission hall in a side street at the lower end of the Newtownards Road in Belfast in 1964. I was but a Christian for six months and as Dr Paisley on that text, I had a meeting with God. the

Such is God's demand of His people before they can enjoy the "showers of blessing" from His merciful hand. The old hymn states it well.

*There shall be showers of blessing,
If we but trust and obey;
There shall be seasons refreshing,
If we let God have His way.*

Yieldedness to God and obedience to His Word - these are the requirements set down by the Lord if we are to enjoy His grace and power amongst us.

God help us to learn that lesson so wonderfully illustrated in those days of battle and conflict, faithfulness and victory, amongst our forefathers in 19th century Ulster.



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Irish History Part 7: Irish Home Rule

Hindsight would tell us that one of the purposes served by the glorious 1859 revival was the strengthening of the Biblical convictions of the Protestant people of Ulster, to ready them to meet the onslaught of the campaign for "Home Rule for Ireland", which became the chief feature of Irish politics in the last quarter of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century.

When William Gladstone came to power in Westminster for the first time (he served as Prime Minister on four separate occasions, he was faced with an Ireland increasingly agitated with various campaigns, all of which sought separation from the United Kingdom in one form or other. He had become impressed by the political stance of a radical young Protestant landowner, Charles Stewart Parnell, who headed up the home rule movement. Gladstone described him as 'the most remarkable person he had ever met.' This admiration showed itself in the efforts Gladstone made to have the Westminster Parliament pass a 'Home Rule' Bill. He made two attempts. The first was in 1886. It was defeated in the House of Commons. In 1893 he tried again with a little more success. The Second Irish Home Rule Bill passed the House of Commons, but was defeated in the House of Lords.

Gladstone died in 1898. The "Home Rule" cause did not reappear on Westminster's agenda until after the 1910 general election when the nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party under its leader John Redmond held the balance of power in the House of Commons. Prime Minister H. H. Asquith came to an understanding with Redmond, that if he supported his move to break the power of the House of Lords, whereby he could have his finance bill passed, Asquith would then in return introduce a new Home Rule Bill. True to his promise to Redmond, Asquith introduced the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912. As in 1886 and 1893, it was ferociously opposed by Ulster unionists, for whom Home Rule was seen as "Rome Rule" but it was passed by Parliament.

The spiritual influences of the '59 Revival' were seen in this view of "Home Rule." For Unionists, it meant a Dublin parliament dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, a threat to their cultural identity as British and discrimination against them as a religious minority. This spiritual perception of the threat of "Rome Rule" was the result of the heightened awareness of all things Biblical and spiritual which sprang from the '59 Revival.

This awareness of the dangers posed by "Home Rule" was not the only indication of the Revival's effect upon the minds and hearts of Ulster Protestants. There were other indications displayed in their response to "Rome Rule." For a start, the three main churches, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland all gave united leadership in opposition to "Rome Rule."

We have mentioned the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Anglican Church of Ireland on a number of occasions in these programmes but never have spoken of the Methodist Church and its role in the spiritual life of Ireland. Now might be an appropriate time.

In 1747 one of John Wesley's preachers, a Welshman called Thomas Williams, came to Dublin from England, and formed what was to be the first permanent Methodist Society in Ireland. John Wesley visited Dublin in August of the same year to meet this society. Not long after Wesley's return to England, a riot broke out in Dublin, and the premises in which the Methodists were meeting were badly damaged. Wesley sent his younger brother Charles to the city to rally the frightened members.

Samuel Handy, a gentleman with an estate in Co. Westmeath, heard that one of his family had become involved with the Methodists, and hurried to Dublin to remonstrate with her. She persuaded him to meet them, and the meeting convinced him of their value. He offered his residence, Coolalough in the parish of Ardnurcher, as a base from which they might work in the Irish Midlands.

The offer was, of course, accepted, and Handy introduced the preachers to his relations and friends within a radius of about 35 miles from his house. Within months, a half dozen societies had been formed in the area. Later, others would do something similar and Methodism spread along a chain of family connections.

John Wesley sent other preachers from England to pioneer in different counties. They tended to visit the



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cities and market towns, and to attract attention by preaching wherever they could attract a crowd. Wesley began to visit Ireland regularly to encourage the societies they formed, and the growth of the movement can be plotted by his lengthening itineraries, first to south and west, but then to the north. His first visit to Ulster was in 1752.

As a Calvinist, I do not agree with many of the doctrines the Methodist preachers proclaimed. However, I cannot but admire the courage and zeal many of them showed in the face of persecution, not only from Romanism but also from spiritually dead, so-called Protestant ministers. I must mention one amongst those early pioneers: Gideon Ouseley. Married at age 20, Gideon Ouseley led a wild life that wasted both his own and his wife's fortunes. After losing an eye when shot in a tavern brawl, a loss that reputedly left him with a frightening appearance, Ouseley left his wild ways behind him. In 1791 he was converted to Christ by the witness of some English soldiers stationed in Dunmore, Co Galway. He set out to win his family and friends to Christ. Gideon Ouseley preached the gospel, mostly in Ulster, until his death. His knowledge of the Irish language and his eccentric preaching astride a white horse won him renown as Methodism's "apostle to the Irish". I have read with joy of accounts of some of his meetings with God and experiences of the power and glory of the Holy Ghost in those days of blessing.

He may not have agreed with my Calvinism, but I would have delighted in the power of God he enjoyed.

All the membership of all three churches, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland, had greatly benefitted from the revival of 1859 and it showed in the strong anti-home rule stance of their leadership. What a contrast to today's ecumenical, unfaithful and deceitful church leaders!

Even amongst the political responses of the political leaders, the influence of the Revival was seen. Edward Carson and James Craig, leaders of the unionists, were instrumental in organising the Ulster Covenant against the "coercion of Ulster". The Covenant, which was styled after "The Solemn League and Covenant" of 1643, when the Scottish Covenanters at that time made a political and military alliance with the leaders of the English Parliamentarians. Even in this can be seen the influence of God stirring men to recall the mercies their forefathers had enjoyed at His hand, in times of danger and distress, and the means of deliverance they sought.

The Ulster Covenant was signed by 237,368 men, and the similarly worded Declaration, by 234,046 women in and around 28th September, 1912.

In January 1913, some 100,000 Ulstermen banded together into the Ulster Volunteer Force to resist the imposing of "Rome Rule." Successful steps were taken to smuggle arms into Ulster to arm the Ulster Volunteer Force. But the schemers behind the Home Rule Bill were to be denied their victory. The Third Irish Home Rule Bill passed by Parliament never came into force, due to the intervention of World War I (1914-18) and of the later Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916.

I might just add that the Ulster Volunteer Force became the basis of The 36th (Ulster) Division, a division of Lord Kitchener's New Army formed in September 1914. Members of the Ulster Volunteer Force formed thirteen additional battalions for three existing regiments: the Royal Irish Fusiliers, the Royal Irish Rifles and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. The 36th was one of the few divisions to make significant gains on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. According to military historian Martin Middlebrook: The leading battalions (of the 36th (Ulster) Division) had been ordered out from the wood just before 7.30 am. At zero hour bugles blew the "Advance". Up sprang the Ulstermen and, without forming up in the waves adopted by other divisions, they rushed the German front line By a combination of sensible tactics and Ulster dash, the prize that eluded so many, the capture of a long section of the German front line, had been accomplished. During the Battle of the Somme the Ulster Division was the only division of 10th Corps to have achieved its objectives on the opening day of the battle. This came at a heavy price, with the division suffering in two days of fighting 5,500 officers and men killed, wounded or missing. War correspondent Philip Gibbs said of the Division, "Their attack was one of the finest displays of human courage in the world."



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There were few homes in Ulster that did not suffer loss in that dark day! Of nine Victoria Crosses given to British forces in the battle, four were awarded to 36th Division soldiers.

In 1916, the The Easter Rising took place in Dublin. The Rising was mounted by Irish republicans with the aims of ending British rule in Ireland at a time when the United Kingdom was heavily engaged in World War I. It utterly failed, due mostly to the confused leadership of the Irish Volunteers. A letter from their commander, Eoin MacNeill, was a last minute attempt to cancel the Easter Rising. That letter helps explain the fact that instead of some 10,000 men taking part in the rebellion across Ireland only some 2000 in the Dublin area took part.

Doubtless, we can see the providential mercy of God in this failure. But out of the attempted Rebellion there arose to the fore of Irish politics, the political party that has long been espoused to murder and terror and has been guilty of innumerable incidents of slaughter and mayhem in the intervening 100 years. I am referring to Sinn Fein. After the the failure of the Rising, republicans came together under the banner of Sinn Féin. In the 1918 general election, Sinn Féin won 73 of Ireland's 105 seats, and in January 1919, its MPs assembled in Dublin and proclaimed themselves Dáil Éireann, the parliament of Ireland.

In Westminster, the issue of Ireland and Home Rule arose once more after World War I, although this time, the coercion of the Ulster Protestants into a Roman Catholic dominated Irish Free State was unthinkable to London. The sacrifice of Ulstermen in the Great War made that so. The fourth and final Home Rule Bill partitioned the island. The six counties of Northern Ireland were established within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the other 26 counties became known as the Irish Free State.

The formation of Northern Ireland and its exclusion from an "all-Ireland" settlement divided the Sinn Fein movement and a civil war was the result. The Free State party, which favoured the settlement as the best they were likely to get, triumphed and the hard line Sinn Fein members under Eamonn DeValera were defeated. In Northern Ireland, the new political entity settled quickly into the business of government, though the armed section of Sinn Fein, known as the Irish Republican Army, mounted guerrilla raids on its borders as well as from within strongly populated Roman Catholic areas inside Northern Ireland.

However, God had yet more mercy for the people of Ulster. An Ulster native, William Patterson Nicholson was a preacher born in Bangor, County Down in April 1876. W P, as he was later to be affectionately known, began to preach the gospel of Christ in 1899 at the age of 23. He spent some years in California and in various other places within the United States and was known as a man who used straightforward language which greatly appealed to the common man. In the providence of God this man was directed to return to his native land in 1920 and he began preaching in a series of gospel missions which were visited by the blessed power of heaven and revival broke out.

We will finish our story of this Province, so unspeakably privileged by Heaven in our next two lectures.

Irish History Part 8: From the beginnings of Northern Ireland until the 30 years of IRA terror

The period immediately after the formation of the Northern Ireland state was one of great unrest. Irish republicans from within the boundaries of the infant state and from the border area separating it from the Irish Free State, as the 26 county southern state, ruled from Dublin, was known, engaged in acts of terrorism against the security forces and against anything linked to the new administration. Telephone exchanges, custom posts and the like, were regularly attacked. The Royal Ulster Constabulary was formed and it in turn was supported by auxiliary forces comprised of part-time policemen. They were known as A Specials, full-time support units, B Specials, part-time units and for a time, C Specials. This latter force was only to be called upon in an emergency.

These forces were very successful against IRA marauders, mainly due the fact that they was comprised of local men patrolling their own areas and therefore they were able to identify very quickly any suspicious



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outsiders on the move.

However, far above the efforts of these brave men, who were of course very open to attack by the IRA as they went about their ordinary day-time employment, there was another agency which played a major and decisive part in the quelling of the early violence and terror.

I mentioned in my last broadcast that W P Nicholson, a fiery evangelist, had returned to his native land in 1920. He immediately began a series of meetings in various major centres in the east of the province. Hundreds of people were saved in these meetings. I had an opportunity, when a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly in the early 1980s, to search the records' library of the Parliament Buildings in Stormont, Belfast, and discover figures related to murder and terror during the first ten years of Northern Ireland. It was most remarkable that after a few years, when the victims of terror and murder were numbered in their hundreds annually, the numbers very rapidly declined until in the early 1930s they had fallen to single figures. Indeed, some years in the 1930s saw no murders committed at all. Regardless of our appreciation of the bravery of our security forces, I do not think that it was their labours alone that saw the decline in terrorism and murder. No, the blessing of God through the preaching of the Word of God had a sanctifying, sobering impact upon our state in the years of its infancy.

One example of the impact of W P Nicholson's preaching may be seen in the fact that the great shipyard in Belfast, Harland and Wolff, was required to allocate a huge shed to receive the stolen tools and items of equipment, returned by men, converted to Christ and convicted of their stealing in Mr. Nicholson's meetings. The gospel turned men from more than stealing. It turned many from crimes of violence and murder and this is illustrated in the annual police crime figures I have already referred to.

To this day, there are many Christian families who can trace the mercy of God within their family back to the meetings and missions of W P Nicholson. A story involving my mother when she was a girl of 16 in the employment of a Christian doctor and his wife in Bangor, Co Down, in 1924, illustrates the impact of this man of God.

My mother was invited to share the evening meal with the doctor and his family one Lord's Day when the guest was W P Nicholson. He asked my mother if she was saved? My mother, a good Episcopalian and ignorant of evangelical truth to a great extent, replied: "O no! I am Church of Ireland!" Mr. Nicholson urged upon her the claims of the gospel of Christ and said in closing: "Should you ever get married and have a son, may God make him a preacher."

My mother had three sons. Two of them died in infancy and I was the third and the only one to survive. She quietly told me that story one day, quite some time after I was saved and seeking to serve the Lord in the gospel ministry. I could see that she was pondering upon and savouring the great mercy of God to her that was linked to that blessing pronounced so long ago by a great man of God. Like Mary of old, she had "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart," Luke 2:19.

I am sure that there are many other stories that could be told by people still, and will be told one day, of the workings of God through His servant, W P Nicholson. He passed away and went to his reward on 29th October, 1959.

Although in the mercy of God, IRA terrorism declined it never went away completely. Political relations south of the border were complex and volatile. The IRA remained prepared to take over the country by insurrection. In November 1926, the IRA seized eleven Garda barracks, as the Free State police force was called, shooting dead two Gardaí. The Free State immediately used its Special Powers Act to intern 110 IRA men the next day. When Eamonn de Valera's Fianna Fáil party won the 1932 election, republican prisoners were released and the organisation legalised. However, in 1935, the IRA was banned once again. De Valera's government increasingly followed a strict anti-IRA policy. DeValera's political position had altered, for by entering government he had accepted the terms of the 1921 Anglo Irish Treaty. De Valera was now deemed a traitor by Sinn Fein and the hard line IRA.



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The ideology of the IRA shifted to the left and became communistic. De Valera's Free State government initiated anti-IRA legislation that was far more repressive than anything the Northern Ireland government contemplated. This was largely out of a need to protect itself from the possibility of a coup d'état by the IRA, which had still a large body of sympathisers in the Irish Free State. In January 1939, the IRA Army Council declared war against Britain, and a Sabotage Campaign began a few days later. On 23 December 1939, IRA members stole almost the entire reserve ammunition store of the Irish Army from the Magazine Fort in Dublin's Phoenix Park. This became known as the "Christmas Raid" in IRA folklore. The Irish Minister for Justice, Gerald Boland, at an emergency session of the Dáil, introduced the Emergency Powers bill to reinstate internment, the Military Tribunal, and executions for IRA members. It was rushed through and given its third reading the next day creating the Emergency Powers Act.

When the Second World War started, Northern Ireland threw itself into the war effort. Tens of thousands of men volunteered for the armed forces. In contrast, the Irish Free State declared itself neutral and the Swastika flew in Dublin throughout the war years, only being lowered on one occasion, the death of Hitler in 1945! De Valera formally offered his condolences to the German Minister in Dublin on that occasion. This did some damage to Ireland, particularly in the United States.

When the USA entered the war in 1941, the first US troops to land in Europe did so in Northern Ireland in 1942. All told, some 300,000 troops were stationed here and made welcome during the conflict. My own cousin married a GI and after the war went to live with her husband in Florida where members of her family still reside. There was no welcome for the troops in what is now the Irish Republic. American citizens, especially those who are the descendants of those gallant men who landed on Ulster soil some 72 years ago, and who joined in common cause with the British citizens in Ulster against the terrorism of Nazi Germany, should bear that in mind.

After the Second World War, Ireland was declared to be a republic in 1949 and all links that remained to the United Kingdom were abolished. There was some measure of regrouping by the IRA and in the mid-fifties they commenced a border campaign which at first received sympathy and support from the south. However, internment without trial, introduced first in Northern Ireland and then in the Republic of Ireland, curtailed IRA operations and ultimately broke their morale. Eighteen people in total were killed during the campaign, of whom seven were members of the RUC and eight were members of the IRA itself. The campaign was on the whole a failure. It petered out in the late 1950s, and was officially ended in February 1962.

I have no doubt that one of the lasting legacies of the ministry of W P Nicholson was the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster in 1951. The link with the man is even more obvious when we recall that at the first morning service of Ravenhill Evangelical Church after the ordination and installation of its new young minister, Ian Paisley, in 1946, W P stood up and congratulated the young minister and prayed for God's blessing upon him, asking the Lord that he might be given a tongue to be used against the Lord's enemies as rough as that of an old cow.

Five years later the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster was born in Crossgar, Co. Down. Ian Paisley found himself in a battle for the gospel of Christ after the church hall of Lissara Presbyterian Church was refused to the elders of that church when they invited him to conduct a gospel mission. The elders, encouraged by Ian Paisley, separated from Lissara church and the first Free Presbyterian congregation was born.

So began a witness, which at least to some degree, emulated the spread of the gospel out of Ireland in the days following the preaching of Patrick. Today, the Free Presbyterian banner flies in all five continents. To God alone be the honour.

But the hardest of times for Ulster in many a year were about to begin. In the early 1960s, "Civil Rights" became a slogan justifying insurrection and disorder in many lands. In Ulster, this seemingly innocuous demand became the cover for a campaign of terror which lasted for over 30 years and cost the lives of over 3550 people, of whom more than 1800 were civilians, 1117 were security force members, 399 were republican terrorists and 162 were loyalists engaged in terrorism.



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To the world, the IRA made its case for terrorism on the basis that Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland suffered persecution and had to be defended and liberated. The truth is that the IRA killed a very large number of Roman Catholics. The story of Jean McConville, aged 37, a widow with 10 children, who was abducted and killed by the IRA because she gave aid to a dying soldier at her front door at Divis Flats, Belfast is well known. She became one of the "Disappeared". Mrs McConville's remains were buried at Templetown beach, Carlingford, Co. Louth and accidentally found by members of the public while they were walking on Shelling Hill beach.

The remarkable courage and quiet dignity of her family, during their long ordeal are in stark contrast to the utter callousness and ruthlessness of their mother's killers.

High ranking IRA members are on record as stating that Gerry Adams, frequent visitor to the White House in Washington, gave the order for her murder!

Were Roman Catholics persecuted in Northern Ireland during the days prior to the IRA's campaign?

The situation for Roman Catholics in one area of civil administration, that of Education, serves to illustrate the conditions under which they lived in Ulster. Prior to the late 1940s, state education was provided as free to all. If a Protestant or Roman Catholic wished to educate their child outside the state system then they had to pay for that provision. The Roman Catholic people chose to do that.

From the introduction of the Education Act of 1947, Roman Catholic schools were partly state-funded but organised and controlled by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools who approved and appointed all its own teachers. At first the funding was in the region of a 60% grant for the erection of buildings. That was increased progressively until in the 1980s a 100% grant for all building programmes, school equipment and teachers' salaries was given. Such aid was never given to Protestants. We here, in Kilskeery, operate an Independent Christian School for which there is not one penny of government support available!

Far from being persecuted, the Roman Catholic Church, while publicly and frequently disclaiming all support for IRA violence, has nevertheless been linked through the activities of a significant number of its priests to the IRA campaign. Over the years I have reported on these incidents but perhaps the most notorious was the case of the bombing of Claudy, a quiet Co Londonderry village. Nine people, including a young girl, were killed and 30 injured when three car bombs exploded in July 1972.

According to an article in the London "Telegraph" of August 24th, 2010, "Father" James Chesney's role in the IRA attack 'was covered up'. The Northern Ireland police, then the Royal Ulster Constabulary, were prevented from investigating the role of the priest after the London government (Northern Ireland was then under direct rule from London) and the Roman Catholic Church conspired to protect him. Chesney was transferred to a parish in Co Donegal, outside the Northern Ireland jurisdiction, following secret talks between the 1972 Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw and the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland at that time, Cardinal William Conway.

No-one has ever been charged with the murders. At that time, the present Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive, Martin McGuinness was the IRA's second-in-command in Londonderry, which is just 9 miles from Claudy.

Chesney died in 1980 aged 46. Details of the cover-up were revealed in a report by the Northern Ireland police ombudsman in 2010. The police recently announced that they were suspending the investigation as they could not proceed any further with the investigation.

In 2002, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Derry, Dr Seamus Hegarty, said: "It is a matter of public record that Father Chesney was a priest of good standing in the Diocese of Derry."

Only "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ," (Romans 2:16) will the full details of the involvement of the Church of Rome in the terrorism inflicted upon the people of Ulster be fully



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known. Enough is known at present, to suspect that many, many more of her clerics were actively engaged in IRA atrocities.

While the Protestant community is not without its faults and sins and from its ranks there have come those who have been guilty of the vilest of crimes, it must be noted that there has not been the retaliation against Roman Catholics which perhaps in other communities would have been felt thoroughly warranted, and that where there has been retaliation, it has been utterly repudiated by the general Protestant populace. How different this is from the support given by Roman Catholics to Sinn Fein/IRA and its campaign of terror. That support has never faltered at the ballot box but rather increased and that is not to be wondered at when there were within the ranks of the Roman Catholic clerics men like James Chesney.

Irish History Part 9: The Sad Betrayal that brought Terrorists into Government

There is a peace that is more dangerous, more deadly than war! There is an enemy with a smile on his face more destructive than one with a sword in his hand.

War wearies a people and they are less inclined to caution and prudence when a tempting possible way to peace is set before them.

After 30 years of vicious terrorism and slaughter at the hands of the Irish Republican Army, political chicanery and betrayal by successive Westminster governments and the devious slyness of the main so-called Protestant Churches, not to mention the ineffective and self-seeking politicking by local unionist politicians, the Ulster Protestant was brought to a state where peace at any price was to be welcomed.

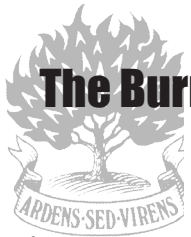
That was made very evident in the vote which followed the "Good Friday Agreement" of April 1998. The GFA involved Irish Nationalism being brought into a power-sharing arrangement with Unionists in a Stormont regime. 71% of the Northern Ireland population voted in favour of the GFA on May 22nd 1998. The vote indicated that a very large section of the Protestant people had voted in favour of the Agreement. Direct rule by London came to an end when power was formally devolved to the new Northern Ireland Assembly, which met in Parliament Buildings, Stormont, 2 December 1999.

An essential part of the GFA was the decommissioning of all terrorist weapons. Two political parties, Sinn Féin and the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) were linked to paramilitary organisations: the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) respectively.

Both the British and Irish governments committed to the early release of prisoners serving sentences in connection with the activities of paramilitary groups, provided that those groups continued to maintain "a complete and unequivocal ceasefire".

A date of May 2000 was set for the total disarming of all paramilitary groups. This was not achieved, causing the Assembly to be suspended on a number of occasions as a consequence of Unionist objections. A series of rounds of decommissioning by the IRA took place in October 2001, April 2002 and October 2003 and in July 2005 the IRA announced the formal end of its campaign.

The only party to oppose the GFA was the Democratic Unionist Party led by Dr. Ian Paisley. The new administration was beset by problems which were naturally exploited by the DUP. The Assembly and Executive were established in December 1999 on the understanding that decommissioning would begin immediately, but were suspended within two months due to lack of progress on arms decommissioning. The Assembly and Executive were re-established in May 2000 as Provisional IRA decommissioning eventually began. Aside from the decommissioning issue, however, ongoing paramilitary activity, on a lower level compared to the past, by the Provisional Irish Republican Army continued. Arms importations, smuggling, organised crime, "punishment beatings", intelligence-gathering and rioting were continuing unabated and created great difficulties for the advocates of the new arrangements.



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A large portion of the Unionist population began to regret the support they had given to the Ulster Unionist Party and its embracing of the GFA and began to swing toward the DUP and its opposition to the GFA and its calling of the Agreement "a betrayal of Ulster". The overall result of these problems was to damage confidence among unionists in the Agreement. The anti-Agreement DUP defeated the pro-Agreement Ulster Unionist Party led by David Trimble in the 2003 Assembly election.

In 2004, negotiations were held between the British and Irish governments, the DUP and Sinn Féin on an agreement to re-establish the institutions. These talks initially failed. On 26 September 2005, it was announced that the Provisional Irish Republican Army had completely decommissioned its arsenal of weapons and "put them beyond use". Nonetheless, many unionists, most notably the DUP, remained sceptical and agreement on how to restore the power-sharing assembly still had not been reached as of July 2006. Further negotiations took place, behind closed doors, in October 2006, and these led to the infamous St Andrews Agreement.

It was during these negotiations that the DUP changed its position, doubtless seeing the opportunity for power, since it had replaced the Ulster Unionist Party as the largest unionist party in Northern Ireland. Were it to accept power-sharing it would be able to nominate the one who would hold the office of the First Minister. But Sinn Féin had overtaken the Social Democratic and Labour Party as the largest Irish Nationalist/Republican party. If the DUP were to enter power-sharing it would be with that party of which, but a short three months before, Dr Paisley had said, in a 12th July celebration speech, that Sinn Féin would only enter government in Northern Ireland over his dead body!

Despite this pronouncement, in May 2007, a power sharing executive was again established to govern Northern Ireland. The second Northern Ireland Executive consisted of the DUP and Sinn Féin, with Ian Paisley of the DUP as First Minister and Sinn Féiner Martin McGuinness, notoriously prominent gunman and leader of the IRA, as Deputy First Minister. Although Dr. Paisley was the head of the government, he and Martin McGuinness held equal powers within the power-sharing arrangement. The terms 'First Minister' and 'Deputy First Minister' are misleading. It was acknowledged that the truth of the matter was that Ian Paisley could not issue a letter as First Minister without the approval of Martin McGuinness, the Deputy First Minister. They were politically joined at the hip as it were!

There was consternation amongst supporters of Dr Paisley when he spoke of the possibility of power-sharing with unrepentant terrorists and murderers. There was a number of prominent DUP politicians who indicated to Dr Paisley that they would not follow him into power-sharing with Sinn Féin. It is widely reported that they were given the ultimatum of following him into power-sharing with Sinn Féin or have Stormont closed and their Assembly role with its large monthly salary and expenses forfeited. The rebellion disappeared as snow off a ditch on a sunny spring day!!

However, there were those who broke with the DUP and began to campaign against the proposed power-sharing arrangement. A chief source of opposition was the Free Presbyterian Church of which Dr Paisley was Moderator at that time. It was declared within Presbytery meetings from the Spring of 2007 that for Dr Paisley to occupy the chair at Presbytery meetings and also hold the office of First Minister in a power-sharing executive with Sinn Féin was a conflict of interests which greatly compromised the gospel witness of the Free Presbyterian Church. A motion which I proposed was debated in the Presbytery of February 2007.

The motion read:

Dr Paisley, should he enter upon the duties of First Minister in a power-sharing Executive, with all its arduous duties, should simultaneously relinquish the office of Moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster in the interests of the well-being and unity of the church.



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I said the following in support of the motion:

It is not my purpose in proposing this motion to discuss at length the merits or demerits of the St Andrews Agreement.

It is, however, my desire to have it recognised by all in this Presbytery that there is a deep division of opinion within this Presbytery and the FPC generally about the St Andrews Agreement and that we cannot remain indifferent to it.

There are those who utterly reject the SAA and all that springs from it because they deem it totally unacceptable to see the unrepentant murderers of many, many innocent people, Roman Catholic and Protestant, in government.

This Presbytery has accommodated diversity of political opinion in the past and I hope that it will continue to do so.

There is no divine authorisation claimed for the SAA or the political coalition that it appears about to give birth to. There can therefore be no question of defying the will of God when one rejects the SAA.

However, a real difficulty will arise for those who reject the SAA if Dr. Paisley takes up the office of First minister in coalition with Martin McGuinness.

That would mean that the FPC would be linked undeniably, through its Moderator, to a political regime and to the pronouncements and actions of that regime, which is utterly rejected by many in this Presbytery and by many within the ranks of general church membership.

In the past, our Presbytery maintained that a link exists between church leaders and the members of the denominations they led. Even when the members rejected the actions of their leaders it did not, in the view of Free Presbyterianism, exonerate them from being party to their leaders' activities.

Such a view by our Presbytery was and is perfectly scriptural, only now it applies to us. I cannot repudiate the activities of the Coalition government while the Moderator of this Presbytery leads that government.

We, as a church, become linked to all that the coalition government will be and will do and will say. That would be totally unacceptable to many ministers and elders as well as hundreds of members of our church.

The FPC must at all costs be yoked to none but Christ and His Word.

We must not be linked in any way to that which will espouse views and policies that are repugnant to God and His Word. Who is there to say that Sinn Fein/IRA can espouse anything other than that which is repugnant to God?

This Presbytery must maintain its independence and its freedom to speak for Christ without equivocation or inconsistency.

I cannot imagine anyone disagreeing with this fundamental truth. To that end I propose this motion.

This debate was followed by other debates during the Springtime of 2007 because there were those who were determined to support Dr. Paisley irrespective of political "about turn" that had taken place. A Commission of Presbytery was set up to consider over the summer whether or not there was a conflict of interests in Dr Paisley holding these two offices. That Commission reported at the September annual meeting of the Presbytery when customarily the offices of presbytery are declared open and nominations are received and voted upon for the filling of those offices for incoming 12 months. The majority opinion of the Commission was that it was incompatible for Dr. Paisley to hold both offices.



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Dr Paisley had repeatedly said that he would not give up the office of First Minister which he had held from May of that year. Therefore it was proposed that he should not stand for the office of Moderator. The outcome of the ensuing debate was that Dr Paisley asked and was allowed to stand down at the end of 2007.

It was widely believed that these events within the Free Presbyterian Church gave rise to a current which saw Dr Paisley removed by his party from the office of First Minister and then a little later as leader of the DUP within a period of just over a year.

It was a traumatic and heart-breaking time for many within the Free Presbyterian Church since it saw brethren of long-standing pitted against brethren. It is difficult to write and speak of times of anguish and grief which have occurred within living memory and in which you have played a part. It was indeed a time in which men had to decide the chief loyalty and love of their life. Was it a man greatly admired and beloved for many, many years or was it Christ and His precious Word?

I have no doubt that the simple gospel witness begun in Ireland so long ago, in the days of Patrick and nourished by Heaven and preserved from the enemies of the gospel in the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, was once again preserved from extinction by this decision to withstand the effectual destruction of the separation and distinctions between the political kingdoms of men and Christ's kingdom which God demands of His people. Unrepentant terrorists may have come to power in Ulster, thanks to the compromise and folly of ambitious politicians, some of whom profess faith in Christ, but God's cause is not defeated or destroyed.

There is but a flickering flame today in comparison to the blessed conflagrations of former times such as those of the 1630s, the 1700s, 1859, the 1920s and even those blessed days amongst the congregations of the Free Presbyterian Church within living memory in the 1960s and 70s. In these latter times of blessing in Ulster, hundreds were saved and thousands separated from the ecumenical apostasy that blights the land today. Dozens of new Free Presbyterian congregations were formed throughout Ulster. But that God should, in the beginning of the 21st century, do this work and turn back the tide of compromise and betrayal yet again, gives us hope that He has not forsaken His flock in Ulster but will strengthen that which He has begun.

We comfort ourselves in this hope with the words of Paul to the Philippian believers: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," Philippians 1:6, 2:13.

May we, undeserving sinners that we are, see again a fulfilment of that sweet promise, so beloved of God's people in former times of trial, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Luke 12:32.

I have long believed that the flame that God lit by the hand of Patrick, long, long ago, will still be burning in this island, by God's grace, when Jesus comes again.

Amen may it be s0