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## PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISM, PAISLEY AND PAISLEYISM

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'BUT beyond any shadow of a doubt no single man in Northern Ireland bears a greater share of the blame for all the horror that took place than Ian Paisley, leader of the Protestant extremists'—Max Hastings, *Ulster 1969*.

This chapter, indeed this whole book, will have been worthwhile for me if it succeeds in persuading some people living outside Northern Ireland, people who probably have never set foot in the place, that they should think of the province as a region different from anywhere else in the world.

Religious fundamentalism teaches that every word in the Bible must be taken literally. This of course rules out Darwin's theory of evolution. Many of its followers accept St Paul's admonition to his converts not to have any dealings with unbelievers. Strict Protestants adhere to these teachings to the letter, avoiding where possible their Catholic fellow countrymen.

The Protestant majority in Northern Ireland is descended from Scottish and central English planters. It seems to be a racial characteristic that they cannot tolerate a dogmatic approach to religion, being Protestant to the backbone. They are so Protestant that they cannot even accept the tenets of the three main Protestant Churches, the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian and the Methodist. They forsake these bodies in large numbers and worship in small halls dotted throughout the countryside. For years every Saturday the *Belfast Telegraph*

carried advertisements for services the next day at over two hundred places of Protestant worship, three-fifths of them held by denominations and sects outside the three main Protestant Churches. By nature these people are evangelical, revivalist and puritan. That Catholics can accept so much explicit doctrine puzzles and annoys them. They even resent the constraints that Catholicism imposes on its members. These are sincerely held views, which one would not attempt to deny them.

The appointments and furnishings of Protestant churches are generally austere. The services are run in a stern and serious way, with the congregation singing enthusiastically. The Rev. Ian Paisley was not the first of his kind of Protestant minister. Apparently it does something for the psyche of some people to be bawled at by their cleric. They have in the past erected a statue in Belfast, called the 'Black Man', to one of their divines, 'Roaring' Hugh Hanna.

Some years ago I attended a Presbyterian service which happened to be a funeral. It astonished me that there were no facilities provided for the congregation to kneel down. I said to myself 'These people are too independent-minded to kneel even to God.'

When I lived in Dungannon my next-door neighbour was such a person. He was a veterinary surgeon, upright, reliable and hardworking. His day commenced an hour before mine. We had a completely happy, if somewhat formal relationship, and though he never smiled he was civil to a degree. The only time I saw him in an angry mood was the morning after a massive IRA bombing attack on the town. We both stood in the street, deep in broken masonry, debris and crunching glass, surveying the desolation of our bombed houses—for both of us it was the thirteenth time (not because of who we were, but because we lived on the main shopping street of the town). He turned to me in a fury, 'You are responsible for all this!'

I discussed religion with him once or twice. He lent me a religious book, but we were poles apart. Like most fundamentalists, he loved the blood and thunder of the Old Testament. I suggested to him that perhaps it would be more appropriate to stress the New Testament with its gentler message—after

all he would not depend on last year's newspapers or veterinary journals. His answer was typical, a retreat into platitudes.

Living next to him provided the opportunity for our children to meet Protestant playmates. With the segregated schooling and general apartheid of Ulster, the only Protestant children ours ever met were at the ballet classes patronised by both sections of the community. I well remember our children, when they were very young, coming to me in astonishment to tell me that on a Sunday this neighbour was not allowed to have a bottle of stout or read a newspaper.

It is not surprising that in this inflexible environment a person such as Rev. Ian Paisley would be acceptable to many. My first appreciation of his existence was when he behaved in a most scurrilous way at a religious debate in the Oxford Union. He held up the equivalent of a Catholic Host and ridiculed it. This kind of raw Protestantism I soon discovered was one of his hallmarks.

In their book, *Paisley*, Moloney and Pollak tell an almost unbelievable story—unbelievable in that anyone could go so far as to even suggest such things, of how Rev. Paisley accused Cardinal Leo Josef Suenens, Catholic Primate of Belgium, of having presided in 1970 over a Catholic theological congress in Brussels, largely attended by young women, which had turned into a celebration of sexual potency and fertility worship, 'So what the Cardinal arranged for the young, mostly girls, of Brussels, was a show of phallic worship, which symbolises the generative power contained in the semen.' All this denunciation and more was put in a letter to the Church of Ireland Dean of St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast, the reason being that the then retired Cardinal Suenens was scheduled to preach in the Cathedral.

Ian Kyle Paisley was born in Armagh in April 1926, the son of a Baptist minister. He trained to be a parson of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Belfast, then he became the pastor of Ravenhill Evangelical Mission Church. He was ordained as a minister there. (Orthodox Presbyterians maintain that he was never properly ordained). From then onwards he revealed that he was a politician as well as a churchman.

He began to organise a group called the National Union of

Protestants which concerned itself with religion, politics and discrimination in employment—needless to say, to Protestant advantage. From the first, when he addressed meetings he was abusively anti-Catholic, which went down well with his previously brainwashed audience. Slogans like 'Popish tyranny versus Protestant tolerance' were used to advertise his meetings.

He next interested himself in Stormont politics, supporting Protestant hardliners. While supporting his favourite candidate for the 1949 elections in the New Lodge area he was involved in his first sectarian skirmish. His group was stoned in this Catholic ghetto.

He disagreed with mainstream Presbyterians in a dispute over the use of the Protestant church at Crossgar, Co. Down. He regarded its approach as too modernistic and conventional. The outcome was that he resolved when the opportunity presented itself to strike out on his own and establish the Free Presbyterian Church.

About this time he quarrelled with the Orange Order because the Protestant Lord Mayor of Belfast attended the funeral of a Catholic alderman. He still continued to speak at Orange meetings, however, sowing discord among its members. A favourite theme was his antagonism to the World Council of Churches, a Romeward move, as he saw it, although the Catholic Church was not a member, only sending observers to the World Council of Churches in later years.

On the night of 17 June 1959 an event occurred in which Rev. Paisley sowed the first of the dragons teeth for which he was responsible. Many people at this time held the opinion that the Unionist Government welcomed his confrontation tactics because it kept bitterness alive, thereby helping to consolidate Protestant voter support. Had the Stormont authorities acted on this occasion to discipline him or had the British sovereign power stepped in to warn that a line should be clearly drawn, much sorrow would have been avoided in Northern Ireland.

The occasion was a meeting of Ulster Protestant Action in Shankill Road, Belfast. They were addressed by Rev. Paisley. His speech was inflammatory and resulted in a riot in which Catholic houses were attacked and daubed with slogans.

There was also looting. He boasted later about 'a great meeting'. He was not prosecuted.

Rev. Dr Donald Soper, former president of the Methodist Church, came to Ballymena to hold a meeting. Rev. Ian Paisley and his supporters prevented him from speaking. The function ended in a riot. 'The most animal-like meeting of any I have spoken at', Dr Soper said afterwards. Rev. Paisley was taken to court and fined for disorderly behaviour, the fine being paid by a supporter because the Reverend said he would go to gaol rather than pay. From an early date his aim seemed to be a gaol sentence as it would increase his appeal in feuding Northern Ireland.

In October 1962 he led two other Free Presbyterians on a protest outing to Rome, giving as his reason the attendance of the World Council of Churches at the Second Vatican Council. Unlike the abetting Stormont authorities, the Italian Government dealt strongly with these troublemakers. They were hounded by the *carabinieri* and their passports taken from them. There was no protest possible.

In 1964 the Republicans decorated their office window in Divis Street, Belfast with the flag of the Irish Republic as part of their election campaign. Rev. Paisley threatened to march his supporters to remove it, thus forcing the police to act. It was removed on two occasions and the march did not take place. The incident however, caused militant Catholics to gather in order to repel him and his followers. There was rioting with water cannon and petrol bombs both used. Divis Street is in the heart of the Catholic 'ghetto' and for Protestants to suggest that the flags were an incitement there was nonsense.

By endorsing the formation of a new group, the Ulster Constitution Defence Committee, Paisley became associated with some very violent men. The secretary, N. Doherty, was afterwards linked by the police with the UVF and the latter's helper, W. Mitchell, was later exposed as a UVF gunman. Doherty, a close associate of Rev. Paisley, organised the Orange Defence Committee.

A further example of how not to run a country was displayed by the Unionist Government when Rev. Paisley introduced a further tactic, the counter march which, when it

was not nipped in the bud, led to many excesses and much violence on later occasions. The matter developed thus:

The Republicans were to hold their parade for Easter 1966. Rev. Paisley set up a counter-demonstration. The Government, hearing of this, banned the Republican parade (both demonstrations were illegal since they had not been properly notified beforehand). This generated much nationalist resentment.

Again, in 1966, Rev. Paisley led a parade through a Catholic area in Belfast, the Markets and Cromac Square. The marchers carried placards attacking the Catholic Church. There was rioting lasting several hours. Later that evening Rev. Paisley led his followers to where the Presbyterians were holding a social function. They hurled abuse at the guests, who included the Governor, Lord Erskine, and his wife. This lady later had to receive medical treatment for her heart complaint.

Newspapers as far apart as the *New York Times*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and the *Daily Mail* of London, as early as June 1966 were calling for Paisleyism to be confronted by the Unionist Government, but nothing worthwhile was done.

In 1967 the students of Queen's University formed a Republican Club and proposed a march. Rev. Paisley assembled five hundred of his Union Jack-waving mob to block the route. The RUC re-routed the students; this was another blow against what passed for democracy in Northern Ireland.

Paisleyite obstruction of the Dungannon and Armagh civil rights marches has already been documented. He received a gaol sentence for his part in the Armagh demonstration, but was released as part of Major Chichester Clark's amnesty when he became Prime Minister.

In the same way Rev. Paisley and his followers blocked the People's Democracy marchers at Shaftesbury Square. When the Burntollet march arrived in Derry they were to be met by Rev. Paisley and his lieutenant, Major Bunting, who prepared for their arrival by holding 'a religious service'.

The explosions of March-April 1969, which Captain O'Neill claimed forced him from office, were carried out by Stevenson and McDowell among others, who were senior

members of Rev. Paisley's Ulster Constitution Defence Committee and the Ulster Protestant Volunteers.

Stevenson occasionally acted as Rev. Paisley's bodyguard. Out of Ulster Protestant Action, which Rev. Paisley had helped to set up, the UVF developed.

The Cameron Report indicated that Rev. Paisley had a heavy share of direct responsibility for the Northern Ireland disorders.

The Church which he founded had by 1986 spread from Ravenhill Road to include 59 congregations, 49 of which were in Northern Ireland, and the other 10 in the Republic of Ireland, England, North America and Australia. For many years Rev. Paisley has been associated with Dr Bob Jones, the South Carolina fundamentalist preacher, who ran the Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, USA, founded by his father. The university awarded Rev. Paisley a doctorate of divinity in September 1966.

The Democratic Unionist Party, which he founded with the help of Mr Desmond Boal, a Belfast barrister, gathered together the most extreme section of the Protestant working class. Virtually all party decisions were made by himself.

He set up two fundamentalist newspapers, *The Revivalist* and the *Protestant Telegraph*. The *Revivalist's* main object was to lambaste more liberal Protestant sects and to attack Catholicism. The *Protestant Telegraph* went further. There Vatican plots were detailed, 'sexual licences' of the Catholic Church exposed. There were sneering references to nuns: 'The older nuns are raving, while the younger ones are craving'.

'Protestants have always had to stand the diabolical hate of Popery. This hate, when Rome is in power, manifests itself in open and bloody persecution. Rome is a past-master in the use of weapons of torture—the boot, the rack and the thumb-screw—and equally a past-master in the use of weapons of murder—the dagger, the poisoned cup, the bullet and any other murderous missile'.

'Do you know that the nephew of a Roman Catholic prelate attending the Second Vatican Council, during a visit to Rome, saw his uncle unholy seduced by a most unholy woman in the very heart of that most holy of all cities?'

'A spiritual Brothel (the Roman Catholic Church). When to this the same Church nurses, tolerates and promotes clerics

who are not only agnostics but even blasphemers, then such a Church is nothing but a spiritual brothel, harbouring theological prostitutes and ecumenical pimps'.

'The Rome-ward rot—The whole world shall go a-whoring after the Beast. This Bible prophecy has come true in our day. All around us are the glaring evidences of the harvest of the carefully-sown seed of Romanistic apostasy'.

When the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland met the Pope he was later described as 'drunk with the wine of the Roman whore's fornication'.

When Pope John XXIII died, Rev. Paisley said, 'This Romanish man of sin is now in hell.'

The Rev. Paisley alleged, both in the USA and in the Ulster Hall, Belfast on 17 August 1969, that the Passionist Monastery in Belfast was used as an arsenal for guns, including machine guns.

Referring to Catholics in Derry agitating for better housing he said, 'Catholics would be happy to live in a pigsty provided it was near to the Papist Chapel.' In one of his religious services he advocated taking away grants from Catholic schools and that family allowances should not be given from the fourth child onwards. In a BBC interview he called the Pope 'the Roman Anti-Christ', and the Catholic Church 'the harlot of Babylon'.

It is distasteful to have to produce these views and sayings, even for the record.

Captain Terence O'Neill summed up the Paisley phenomenon when he said, 'The activities of Paisleyism had a parallel in the rise to power of the Nazis.' He branded Paisleyite activities as 'the sordid techniques of gangsterism'—but then Captain O'Neill was unable to quell the man and was himself eventually deposed by his Unionist colleagues.

It is surely not surprising that the activities touched upon in this chapter, and they were only a fraction of what occurred, embittered many Catholics. Such recent occurrences make it difficult for many Catholics to give wholehearted allegiance to the Northern State.