

How religion was at the center of the troubles

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Many of the world's worst incidences of death had religion in some aspect of it. The Crusades were scuffles between the Catholics and the Muslims in the 11th through 13th centuries over who had claim over holy sites such as Bethlehem. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 were based on Islamic extremism. Slavery in the U.

S., often justified through the use of the Christian Bible, was the cause of much torture, heartbreak, and oppression. These religious battles, however, are sometimes not caused by two entirely different religions. The Troubles, a civil war in Ireland, was fought between Catholics and Protestants, two religions under the umbrella of Christianity. The Troubles were primarily caused by the differing religions, Catholic and Protestant, and identities adopted by the nationalists and unionists, which led to housing segregation and the Battle of Bogside, which both have still had a segregational effect on those who live in the area today. It is important to know the events that led up to this civil war for context.

Ireland came under the control of England in the late 12th century. Protestant settlers coexisted with the Catholic natives primarily in the northern part of the country. Later - in the early 20th century - many natives were fighting to separate from British control, as they wished to become an independent nation again. In 1920, Britain divided Ireland into two parts: Northern Ireland, a small portion of the original island, and Ireland, the rest of the island. This was to attempt to stop any violent outbreaks from occurring.

The north was, however, divided within itself. According to Brendan McAllister, founding director of Meditation Northern Ireland, 40% of residing citizens were Catholic nationalist, while 60% were Protestant unionists (13). This made the Catholic population the minority, which gave rise to many problems for them. Many of these issues rose in the late 1960s. In 1968, Protestant-unionists were making efforts for Northern Ireland to remain part of the U. K.

while Catholic-nationalists wished for the country to become part of the Republic of Ireland. There were institutional discriminations set against Catholics, however, that had to be tended to. British intervention in 1972 led to an imposed direct rule from London after tensions deteriorated to widespread disorder. Before the British intervened, many of the problems in Northern Ireland were based on religious differences. One of the issues was that Catholics had been suffering from housing discrimination for quite some time.

In the early to mid-1960s, Catholics were being denied apartments, tenants, and houses by local Unionist councils; the residencies were instead given to Protestants. For instance, in March 1965, the " Enniskillen Rural District Council voted to let six new houses to Protestants, ignoring a plea on behalf of a Catholic family ' living in terrible circumstances'" according to Bob Purdie in his book *Politics in the Streets*. Although occurrences like these were rare and scarce in number, they still showed the underlying hatred between the two groups. The Council for Social Justice (CSJ), a group that fought for the rights of disadvantaged Catholics, tended to use religious

differences as a way to blame the local councils for injustices. They rarely used unbiased information to help their cases.

This did, however, help them fight for the rights of Catholics, and they became very successful in doing so. According to writer and activist Bob Purdie in his book *Politics in the Streets*, “ Unionists never answered satisfactorily the CSJ’S points about... the restraints on house-building programmes by Londonderry Corporation [on Catholics] and others in situations where there was a potential for new housing to alter the balance of political power” (102). The use of skewed claims from such a well-known group like this led to many thinking that this issue was solely based on religion. Despite cases of housing discrimination against Catholics due to religion, some of it was caused by income levels. Catholics, on average, made less than their Protestant counterparts.

In *Politics in the Streets*, Bob Purdie states that Catholics had a 4% bias in their favor when families of either religious group with similar incomes were compared. (84) Catholics also generally had larger families than Protestants, which made housing more difficult for them. Housing discrimination was not the only problem that Catholics faced. Many Catholics endured internment. This is the imprisonment of individuals without a trial and was controversially imposed by the Northern Ireland government. Internment applied to nationalists and Catholics suspected of planning against the government.

Historian Paul Dixon says that it is the “ single most disastrous measure introduced during the recent troubles, resulting in a major escalation of violence” (Alpha History). It was introduced by Unionist Prime Minister Brian

Faulkner under the Special Powers Act in August 1971. His discourse with British Prime Minister Edward Heath made internment practices focused not on radical Unionists and Republicans alike, but solely on the Republican and Catholic community. One of the most notable acts of internment was during Operation Demetrius, a set of raids carried out starting on August 9th, 1970 by the British Army and Royal Ulster Constabulary(RUC). The RUC targeted those with suspected involvement in the IRA.

Suspects were transported in “ the dead of night” and interrogated with methods that bordered on torture. Operation Demetrius resulted in the location, arrest, and internment of 342 people in three days, which triggered violent protests from the Catholic community. The most infamous protest against internment was the Battle of Bogside. On August 12th, about 15, 000 Apprentice Boys, a Protestant group, marched through Bogside, which was Catholic residential territory. (Alpha History) There were marches every year prior to this to show dissent against the Catholics.

The group made the mistake of marching when tensions were high and violence was inevitable. Apprentice Boys threw pennies at those in Bogside to condescendingly symbolize the poverty Catholics faced. The Catholics fought back, the police became involved, and the RUC started to use CS gas against those in the battle. This battle deteriorated from a march into murder. According to the BBC, 13 Catholics were killed and another 13 were wounded. This battle shows that the injustices Catholics faced were mainly due to the sectarian and pain-inflicting view that an incredible amount of people had.

The effects of the war still linger, leaving violence in today's Northern Ireland. The country is currently divided into two sections by a wall, ultimately separating the Catholic and Protestant community. In fact, " More than 90 percent of students in Northern Ireland attend segregated schools. Many Protestants say they don't know Catholics personally, and vice-versa." The outbreak of violence between the two neighborhoods is still present to this day. Despite paramilitary group involvement being outlawed, there are still non-public, underground groups causing trouble, with no clear political purpose.

Peace efforts between the two groups have been scarce in number and ineffective. There have been only two efforts in a ten-year span that have attempted rebuilding relations, and neither turned out well. Many have sought trauma relief as of 2014. The Wave Trauma Centre, led by Sandra Peak, is a group that helps those still distraught by the damage the Troubles caused. Sandra Peak says that " There's a blindness to the reality of what many families have been left to carry here" (12).

With the damage that has been caused to the Irish community, it can be said that religion was one of the most influential factors in The Troubles. The modern world has grown into an age of knowledge. The monstrosities that religion can cause are undeniable. The housing discrimination Catholics had to endure were mainly based on disparities between them and Protestants. The Battle of Bogside was a bloody demonstration of the blindness and lack of care humans have for fellow humans who belong to a different belief system.

Even today, there are people who are suffering from the effects of a religious war that happened decades ago. Religion has the potential to cause unnecessary, unjustifiable, and immoral problems for humanity. Honesty can be painful, and religion shows it through the taint of blood it left on the pages of human history.