

BELIEVING IN BELFAST

CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY AFTER THE TROUBLES

Liam D. Murphy

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Murphy, Liam D. (Liam Donat), 1968-
Believing in Belfast : charismatic Christianity after the troubles / Liam D.
Murphy.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-59460-728-8 (alk. paper)

1. Pentecostalism--Northern Ireland--Belfast--History--21st century. 2.
Belfast (Northern Ireland)--Church history--21st century. I. Title.

BR1644.5.G7M87 2010
274.16'083--dc22

2009051503

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS
700 Kent Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919) 493-5668
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America

For the generations of my family in Nova Scotia—
seven from the pioneer.

Bíonn grásta Dé idir an diallait agus an talamh

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

BOUNDARY CROSSINGS: NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICS AND RELIGION IN TRANSITIONS

*Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart**

Liam Murphy's book on changing religious trends and processes in Belfast and Northern Ireland generally gives us a valuable in-depth portrait of struggles, aspirations and negotiations surrounding the concept of peace in this much contested terrain. A great deal, of course, has been written, and continues to be written, about conflicts in Northern Ireland (and historically in Ireland as a whole), in particular those stemming from the times of the Troubles from the 1960s onward. What Liam Murphy's work notably adds to this stream of publications is the depth and detail that comes from his intensive study of religious movements that have been explicitly aimed at engendering peace and transcending sectarian-influenced conflict, while promoting their own reli-

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gious orientations in doing so. Out of, and attempting to transcend, the multiple and oppositional narratives of violence and killing and their divisive implications and purposes, these religious movements and their leaders have sought to tap into initiatives for peace, including those emerging out of the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement of 1998.

The initiatives known as PEACE I and PEACE II have been intended to mitigate both cross-sectarian and cross-Border conflicts and disjunctions and to promote understanding and co-operation by involving people in total community-based projects. The PEACE III Programme was also set up in late 2007 to extend the work further, and was to benefit from an addition of 225 million euros supplied by the European Union (European Commission Home Page, Northern Ireland Office, Belfast, 6 November 2007). Its stated priorities were to continue the process of reconciling communities, in opposition to sectarianism; to help with conflict mediation at local levels; and to assist with the regeneration of urban and rural spaces, so that these could be shared on a cross-community basis. Persons employed under these initiatives have done much work in promoting events that fall within the rubrics laid down in them and in persuading people to come together. Field officers also have evaluated community proposals for funding, bearing in mind their likely viability and their effective cross-sectarian participation. For example, if a community hall is used for meetings that can bring together a cross-community form of participation, grants can be obtained for its repair and renovation. We have observed this process at work at first hand.

In our research in County Donegal in the Republic of Ireland (see, for example, Strathern and Stewart 2005, 2006), the major emphasis has been on studies on overcoming tensions between Northern Ireland and the Republic through activities that can bring people together from both sides of the Border. The role of the Christian churches is often at stake in these contexts, and some Presbyterian Church congregations have been mobilized in pursuit of these aims. The Presbyterian Church, in turn, has been divided between an evangelical and a putatively "mainstream" wing, as has happened pervasively in other churches and in Christian church congregations all over the world (see, for example, Stewart and Strathern 1997, 2000, 2009). However, the pursuit of peace is an aim overtly shared on all sides of such divisions, even though in the wider social arena the divisions themselves generate a range of community conflicts.

Dr. Murphy's concentration throughout his book is on charismatic movements, largely those articulated from within Catholic traditions. This gives his narrative a particularly close insight into the contextual activities of these charismatics, which could be compared with, say, the evangelical wings of Protestant churches, and further with the activities of Pentecostal church adherents.

In addition, the ethnography opens up the possibilities of comparing charismatic action in Belfast to charismatic movements elsewhere, such as Thomas Csordas studied in the U.S. (e.g. Csordas 1994, 1997). Csordas's main focus has been on healing bodily conditions. The charismatics in Belfast have been concerned to advance the peace process and to transcend sectarian conflicts. Movements of this kind tend to adopt an apocalyptic perspective and to see themselves as seeking the purification of places and the restoration of grace to the city so as to overcome territorial divisions. Dr. Murphy follows this theme through in illuminating detail. Along with purification goes the theme of renewal, with the idea that such renewal can come only with the rupture of an old order (including an order of divisions between people) and the creation of a new, more unified order. The rise of charismatic movements is therefore predictable and understandable in situations where there is a historical legacy of severe conflict.

Peace, however, may depend on a further range of factors, including the state of the overall economy and the continuing evolution of political forms of co-operation or conflict. In Northern Ireland, the power sharing coalition between the Democratic Unionist Party of Rev. Ian Paisley (subsequently succeeded to by Peter Robinson) and the Sinn Féin party of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, has conveyed, in a secular context, the feasibility of co-operation across political and sectarian lines of division. This new co-operation, however, may be put further to the test as a result of the global economic downturn from late 2008 onward, which affected both Northern Ireland, as part of the U.K., and the Republic of Ireland. The idea, and reality, of peace, however, had taken hold of the population at large to such an extent that many people of various community identities came together to protest and condemn the killings of two British soldiers and a member of the police service in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, early in 2009 (killings that were attributed to renegade branches of the Irish Republican Army [IRA] (i.e. the Real IRA) said not to have entered into the peace-making process). The popular demonstration of solidarity in the face of these killings was intended to negate the suggestion that sectarian violence would be permitted to return, and to indicate the shared desire to maintain peace through the politics of compromise and mediation. In addition, also in 2009, during the later season of Orange Order Demonstrations, when severe incidents of sectarian provocation and physical violence broke out in a few places such as in the Ardoyne area of North Belfast and in parts of North Antrim, politicians of all parties felt obliged to reflect the prevailing popular feeling that such actions were reprehensible, whichever side was responsible for them. This situation may be attributed, at least in part, to the power sharing arrangement in the Stormont Assembly, which means that

those formerly opposed on numerous fronts now have a shared interest in maintaining a relatively peaceful state of political affairs.

The Ulster Scots, whom we have studied since 2001, represent an in-between category of people. They have played a part in the evolution of politics within the framework of the research for peace. They have done this in three ways: (1) by stressing cultural themes shared with Scotland and long established both in Northern Ireland and in the wider sphere of Ulster, including County Donegal in the Republic of Ireland; (2) in particular, by promoting the Ulster Scots language as a form of expression of identities that was formerly suppressed and unrecognized by officialdom; and (3) by promoting, publishing, and pursuing ties with diaspora populations in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, introducing a transnational dimension to their activities (see e.g. Strathern and Stewart 2005, 2006). As a movement, the Ulster Scots and the government-sponsored Agency which was set up in Belfast to promote their interests, have their own narratives of a historical and contemporary kind, which can be set alongside other narratives in the intricately twisted threads of time.

Overall, what is striking here is how history and changes always continue, giving a new perspective to the past, opening up new chances for the future. Narratives operate in this flux, both reflecting it and influencing its directions. Dr. Murphy has given us an exceptionally detailed account of many of these complexities, and his book is an invaluable addition to the complex literature on conflicts and peace-making in the context of Ireland.

Cromie Burn Research Unit,
University of Pittsburgh
August 2009
PJS and AJS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although too many friends and colleagues have assisted me over the years to mention by name, I must at least thank those individuals without whom this book simply could not have been written.

My first debt of gratitude belongs to the many among whom I worked in Ireland, north and south, whose lives I shared—if for only a relatively short time. Of the following, I can say only that their strong Christian faith is matched by their generosity of spirit and kindness to itinerant strangers. Many thanks are due Denise Bissonnette, Margaret Camlin, Liam Cluskey, Philomena Curley, Shirley Gaston, Billy and Phyllis Gibson, David Jardine, Martin Kelly, Darra and Sandra Kenny, Michael and Greta Knott, Johnston McMaster, Cecil and Myrtle Kerr, Janet Riley, and Jean Rooney. At the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, my work was greatly assisted by Michaela McCabe, Ray Mullan, and Joanne Murphy. Finally, I can scarcely communicate the deep debt I owe Larry and Mary Kelly, who quite literally made me feel like one of their family when I lived in Belfast. If anyone has been completely indispensable to the writing of this book, it is they.

In addition, a great number of other individuals connected with denominational, civil, ecumenical, parachurch, and governmental organizations have been exceedingly helpful to me. Chief among these were the members of three groups—“Agnus Dei Fellowship,” “Divine Fellowship Congregation,” and “Open Door Fellowship”—among whom I conducted the lion’s share of my ethnographic research. These are pseudonyms, as are “Pax Manor” and the names of most devotees whose stories and practices I describe throughout this book. The main exceptions to this are public figures and institutions whose names are well known (for instance, Ian R.K. Paisley and Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle). I will always be grateful to these organizations, their congregations, leaderships, memberships, staffs, volunteers, and visitors, for indulging my desire to “hang around” and pepper them with an endless stream of questions and “small-talk,” to say nothing of the many formal interviews I conducted in churches, cafés, hotel lobbies, pubs, and private homes.

For their generous assistance in helping me to understand their perspectives and organizational dynamics, I am also deeply indebted to various leaders, voluntary personnel, and staff-members of the Archdiocese of Armagh, Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland, Cornerstone Community, Diocese of Down and Connor, Divine Healing Ministries, Elim Pentecostal Church, Forthspring Inter-Community Centre, Institute for Conflict Research, Irish School of Ecumenics, Linen Hall Library, Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, Orange Institution, Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, United Christian Broadcasters, and Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle. In Rostrevor, members of the Christian Renewal Centre were especially helpful in the early phases of my research, as were participants in the Glenmaroon Convent charismatic youth group in Dublin.

The scholarly and research communities of Northern Ireland have also been extraordinarily hospitable, and I am very grateful for all the assistance, encouragement, and friendship I have received through the years. At Queen's University Belfast, faculty, staff, and students of the School of History and Anthropology (formerly the School of Anthropological Studies) and Institute of Irish Studies were extraordinarily helpful. Many thanks to Hastings Donnan, who generously facilitated my being a visiting fellow of Queen's, Dominic Bryan, Ciro De Rosa, Neil Jarman, Graham McFarlane, Callie Persic, Katy Radford, Thomas Taaffe, Thomas Wilson, and Robin Whitaker. Anthony D. Buckley, of Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, is due special thanks both for sitting on my dissertation committee and for generously allowing me to review some of his own fieldnotes and records, published and unpublished. These have been very useful in helping to provide historical context to Belfast's diverse Christian fellowshiping movement. Many thanks are also due Glenn Jordan of East Belfast Mission, Janice Holmes of the University of Ulster, Coleraine Campus, and Steve Bruce of the University of Aberdeen for providing guidance and insight when these were most needed.

I credit Harold W. Scheffler of Yale University and Linda-Anne Rebhun of the University of California, Merced, with guiding me successfully through the turbulent waters of dissertating in the late 1990s. Hal and Linda-Anne have both continued to support me in seeing this manuscript through to publication, and for their encouragement and guidance I will always be grateful.

A number of individuals were kind enough to read and comment on portions of my manuscript at various stages of completion. My sincere thanks to Pamela J. Stewart, Andrew Strathern, Harold W. Scheffler, and Robin Whitaker for their patience with stilted prose and inchoate ideas struggling to be born! Thanks are also due Dominic Bryan and an anonymous reviewer for their ap-

praisal of early chapter drafts. Again, I am especially indebted to Anthony D. Buckley for his willingness not only to thoroughly review my manuscript, but to engage with me in an ongoing dialogue about the past, present, and future of religion in Belfast

At California State University, Sacramento, the task of writing this monograph was supported and encouraged by many friends and colleagues. For reading and providing valuable feedback on various chapter drafts, special thanks are due my colleagues Terri A. Castaneda, Cindi L. Sturtz-Sreetharan, and Raghuraman Trichur in the Department of Anthropology. I also thank Erin E. Stiles of the Department of Anthropology at University of Nevada, Reno, for her insight and support. Thanks also to my senior colleague, Jay Crain, for his guidance and support of junior sociocultural faculty in recent years. I am also very grateful to the Deans of the College of Social Science and Interdisciplinary Studies, Joseph Sheley and his successor, Otis Scott, for graciously granting me a leave-of-absence from CSU Sacramento in 2006–07 in order to complete my manuscript. For the expert map designs included in this book, I am very grateful to Edie Schmidt of Academic Technology and Creative Services at CSU Sacramento. All photographs were taken by the author.

From 1995 through 1998, my pre-doctoral and dissertation field research in Ireland and Northern Ireland was funded by the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences at Yale University, the Albert C. Williams and Andrew W. Mellon Funds (both administered through the Department of Anthropology at Yale University), and by a doctoral research fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. An honorary research fellowship from the School of History and Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast gave me access to Queen's library, gymnasium, and various university resources while I lived in Northern Ireland. After my return to New Haven, a Yale writing fellowship helped immeasurably to move along the process of completing my dissertation. Conference travel grants provided by the Schwartz Fund of the Department of Anthropology at Yale University and the CSU Sacramento Office of Research and Sponsored Projects have made it possible to disseminate my work at a number of professional meetings and conferences. Post-doctoral fieldwork in 2003 was made possible by a research stipend provided by the CSU Sacramento College of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Studies. Completion of much of this book took place in 2006 and 2007, and was made possible by a Richard Carley Hunt Fellowship awarded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

Special thanks are due Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, both of the University of Pittsburgh and Editors of the "New Anthropologies of Europe"

series at Carolina Academic Press, for their support, thoughtful comments, and practical guidance in completing *Believing in Belfast*. I am also indebted to the staff at Carolina Academic Press, especially Zoë Oakes, Kelly Miller, and Tim Colton, for their assistance in polishing and refining the manuscript prior to publication.

In Canada, my parents, Arthur and Patricia Murphy, have for many years been a source of love and support for which I will always be grateful. I am also beholden to my collaborator on other projects, Paul A. Erickson, for his indulgence as I worked on *Believing in Belfast* while simultaneously collaborating with him on new editions of our two textbooks.

Finally, I could not have committed myself so completely to this project without the ongoing love, support, and encouragement of my family. My wife, Stephanie M. Seery-Murphy, has given generously of her time to read, comment, suggest references for, and copy-edit various chapters of my manuscript. Among other things, her extensive knowledge of early modern sources has been invaluable to me as I sought to frame current religion within the “long view” of Western European religious history. I thank our young daughter, Siobhan, simply for giving us the joy of her presence every day.

While having been blessed to receive assistance from all those individuals cited above and many more, I of course accept full responsibility for any and all of the book’s shortcomings.

Liam D. Murphy
Sacramento, California
July 2009

A Note on Orthography

In keeping with a general convention within anthropological writing, I italicize lengthy quotes and songs, and offset them from the main body of the text. Quotes from published sources are indented, but are not italicized.

Although I know of no universal conventions for this, I have chosen to capitalize the terms “Catholic” and “Protestant.” Though many authors prefer the lower-case, and the reference terms “nationalist” and “unionist,” “republican” and “unionist,” or hyphenated composites of these, in general I feel that the broadest terms employed to designate social inclusion or exclusion are appropriate in a book that focuses on religious culture and practice. In accordance with many (but certainly not all) who write about the recent history of Northern Ireland, I capitalize “the Troubles.”

Readers will note that I have chosen not to capitalize the terms “charismatic” and “charismatics,” both used frequently throughout the text. The one exception I allow to this is for the phrase “Charismatic Renewal” (the proper title of a movement within Roman Catholicism), although I occasionally refer to “the renewal” using the lower-case. For the sake of consistency I also spell “pentecostal,” “pentecostals,” and “pentecostalism” with a lower-case “p,” although I am aware that these terms are more often found in the upper case. Because the context of use should be an adequate guide, I leave to readers the task of distinguishing these referential uses from both the everyday adjectival use of the word “charismatic” and the more technical meaning of the term as used in Weberian social theory. The terms “Second Vatican Council” and “Vatican II” are used interchangeably throughout the text.

The use of acronyms to stand for the sometimes unwieldy proper names of organizations can be a daunting prospect when writing about Northern Ireland. Despite a lengthy list of these, I have tried only to use acronyms where they are employed by churches and organizations themselves, or when they are known and used among residents and respondents. Other proper names have been shortened in keeping with local practice (for instance, “Whitewell” for “Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle” and “Corrymeela” for “Corrymeela Community”).

Again, though there are no universal conventions, I capitalize the term “Church” in reference to the proper names of denominations and organizations and (very occasionally) the “universal” Church, and use the lower-case

when discussing church organizations in general and their concrete expression in bricks-and-mortar.

With regard to spelling conventions, I have chosen to substitute North American for British and Irish usage (for instance, “program” rather than “programme,” or “neighborhood” instead of “neighbourhood”). Exceptions to this are quotations and proper names, in which I have endeavored to preserve or emulate the original spelling.

Frequently, I make reference to the four quarters of Belfast because these have tended to mirror residential segregation. Following the *Chicago Manual of Style, fourteenth edition* recommendation, I have opted to capitalize the name of each (for instance, “West Belfast”) because in my experience people often refer to these areas of the city as somewhat discrete from one another. For this same reasons, I refer to the “City-Centre” as a distinctive region slightly to the north of South Belfast.

I use the name “Ireland” to identify the entire island of Eire, north and south. More frequently, my text will reference either the nation-state, “Republic of Ireland,” or the contested region or United Kingdom province, “Northern Ireland.” Readers will note also that I choose to use the term “Northern Ireland” where an adjectival “Northern Irish” might appear to be more grammatical (for instance “Northern Ireland people” instead of “Northern Irish people”). My reason for doing this is simple: in the context of Northern Ireland society, place names and reference terms have always been fraught—even in this new, ostensibly post-Troubles era. Use of terms like Ulster, the Six Counties, the North, Eire, and even Northern Ireland itself often suggests something about the political leanings of the person speaking or writing. Though innocuous to the North American ear, “Northern Irish” is a phrase which might be understood to code for approval of the political status quo; that there are “two” Irelands and not the indivisible monolith of traditional nationalist and republican imaginings. Although there is no perfect resolution to this problem of interpretation, most would now concur that whatever else it describes, “Northern Ireland” is the least semantically loaded of these reference terms, while “Northern Irish” conveys a subtle yet real difference in connotation. If all this seems to some a pointless exercise in oversensitivity, I remind readers that it is precisely a dearth of sensitivity that has ensured the endurance of animosities and resentments even into Northern Ireland’s twenty-first century.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Action for Community Employment
ADF	Agnus Dei Fellowship
AOH	Ancient Order of Hibernians
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCC	British Council of Churches
BCT	Bangor Christian Trust
BI	British Israelism
BMUA	Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area or “Greater Belfast”
CCCI	Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland (before 2005: ECONI)
CCR	Catholic Charismatic Renewal
CCRU	Central Community Relations Unit
CEC	Conference of European Churches
CRAC	Community Relations and Christians
CRC	Community Relations Council
DCT	Down Christian Trust
DFC	Divine Fellowship Congregation
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EAI	Evangelical Alliance Ireland
EC	European Commission
ECONI	Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (after 2004: CCCI)
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EMU	Education for Mutual Understanding
EU	European Union
EVS	European Values Study
FEA	Fair Employment Agency
FEC	Fair Employment Commission
GAA	Gaelic Athletics Association
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
ICC	Irish Council of Churches

ICR	Institute for Conflict Research
IEC	Irish Episcopal Conference
IFB	Intermediary Funding Body
IICM	Irish Inter-Church Meeting
IIS	Institute of Irish Studies (Queen's University Belfast)
INF	Irish National Foresters
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
ISE	Irish School of Ecumenics
LDS	Latter-Day Saints (Church of), the Mormons
LOL	Loyal Orange Lodge
LVF	Loyalist Volunteer Force
MFJ	March for Jesus ("Global" and "Northern Ireland")
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NIEA	Northern Ireland Education Act
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NILT	Northern Ireland Life & Times
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NISFP	Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan (2000–2006)
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NSC	National Service Committee (of Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Ireland)
ODF	Open Door Fellowship
P&R	Peace and Reconciliation
PEACE I	Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland (1994–1999)
PEACE II	Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland (2000–2004; extended 2005–2006)
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland (before 2001: RUC)
RIRA	Real Irish Republican Army
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary (after 2001: PSNI)
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SEUPB	Special European Union Programmes Body
UCB	United Christian Broadcasters, Ltd.
UDA	Ulster Defense Association
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
WCC	World Council of Churches
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association