Believing in Belfast
Charismatic Christianity
After the Troubles

Liam D. Murphy

Carolina Academic Press
Durham, North Carolina
For the generations of my family in Nova Scotia—
seven from the pioneer.

*Bionn 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 Fein 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

References


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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 reason, 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>Action for Community Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Agnus Dei Fellowship</td>
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<td>AOH</td>
<td>Ancient Order of Hibernians</td>
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<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>BCC</td>
<td>British Council of Churches</td>
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<td>BCT</td>
<td>Bangor Christian Trust</td>
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<td>BI</td>
<td>British Israelism</td>
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<td>BMUA</td>
<td>Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area or “Greater Belfast”</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCCI</td>
<td>Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland (before 2005: ECONI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCR</td>
<td>Catholic Charismatic Renewal</td>
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<td>CCRU</td>
<td>Central Community Relations Unit</td>
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<td>CEC</td>
<td>Conference of European Churches</td>
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<td>CRAC</td>
<td>Community Relations and Christians</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>Community Relations Council</td>
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<td>DCT</td>
<td>Down Christian Trust</td>
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<td>DFC</td>
<td>Divine Fellowship Congregation</td>
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<td>DUP</td>
<td>Democratic Unionist Party</td>
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<td>EAI</td>
<td>Evangelical Alliance Ireland</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECONI</td>
<td>Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (after 2004: CCCI)</td>
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<td>ECA</td>
<td>European Court of Auditors</td>
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<td>EMU</td>
<td>Education for Mutual Understanding</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>EVS</td>
<td>European Values Study</td>
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<td>FEA</td>
<td>Fair Employment Agency</td>
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<td>FEC</td>
<td>Fair Employment Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAA</td>
<td>Gaelic Athletics Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Secondary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>Irish Council of Churches</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICR</td>
<td>Institute for Conflict Research</td>
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<td>IEC</td>
<td>Irish Episcopal Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFB</td>
<td>Intermediary Funding Body</td>
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<tr>
<td>IICM</td>
<td>Irish Inter-Church Meeting</td>
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<td>IIS</td>
<td>Institute of Irish Studies (Queen’s University Belfast)</td>
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<tr>
<td>INF</td>
<td>Irish National Foresters</td>
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<td>INLA</td>
<td>Irish National Liberation Army</td>
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<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
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<td>IRB</td>
<td>Irish Republican Brotherhood</td>
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<td>ISE</td>
<td>Irish School of Ecumenics</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDS</td>
<td>Latter-Day Saints (Church of), the Mormons</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOL</td>
<td>Loyal Orange Lodge</td>
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<td>LVF</td>
<td>Loyalist Volunteer Force</td>
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<td>MFJ</td>
<td>March for Jesus (“Global” and “Northern Ireland”)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NIEA</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Education Act</td>
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<td>NIHE</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Housing Executive</td>
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<td>NIILT</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Life &amp; Times</td>
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<td>NIO</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Office</td>
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<td>NISFP</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan (2000–2006)</td>
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<td>NISRA</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency</td>
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<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Service Committee (of Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Ireland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODF</td>
<td>Open Door Fellowship</td>
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<tr>
<td>P&amp;R</td>
<td>Peace and Reconciliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEACE I</td>
<td>Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland (1994–1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSNI</td>
<td>Police Service of Northern Ireland (before 2001: RUC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIRA</td>
<td>Real Irish Republican Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUC</td>
<td>Royal Ulster Constabulary (after 2001: PSNI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDLP</td>
<td>Social Democratic and Labour Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEUPB</td>
<td>Special European Union Programmes Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCB</td>
<td>United Christian Broadcasters, Ltd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDA</td>
<td>Ulster Defense Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFF</td>
<td>Ulster Freedom Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UVF</td>
<td>Ulster Volunteer Force</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UUP    Ulster Unionist Party
WCC    World Council of Churches
YMCA   Young Men’s Christian Association