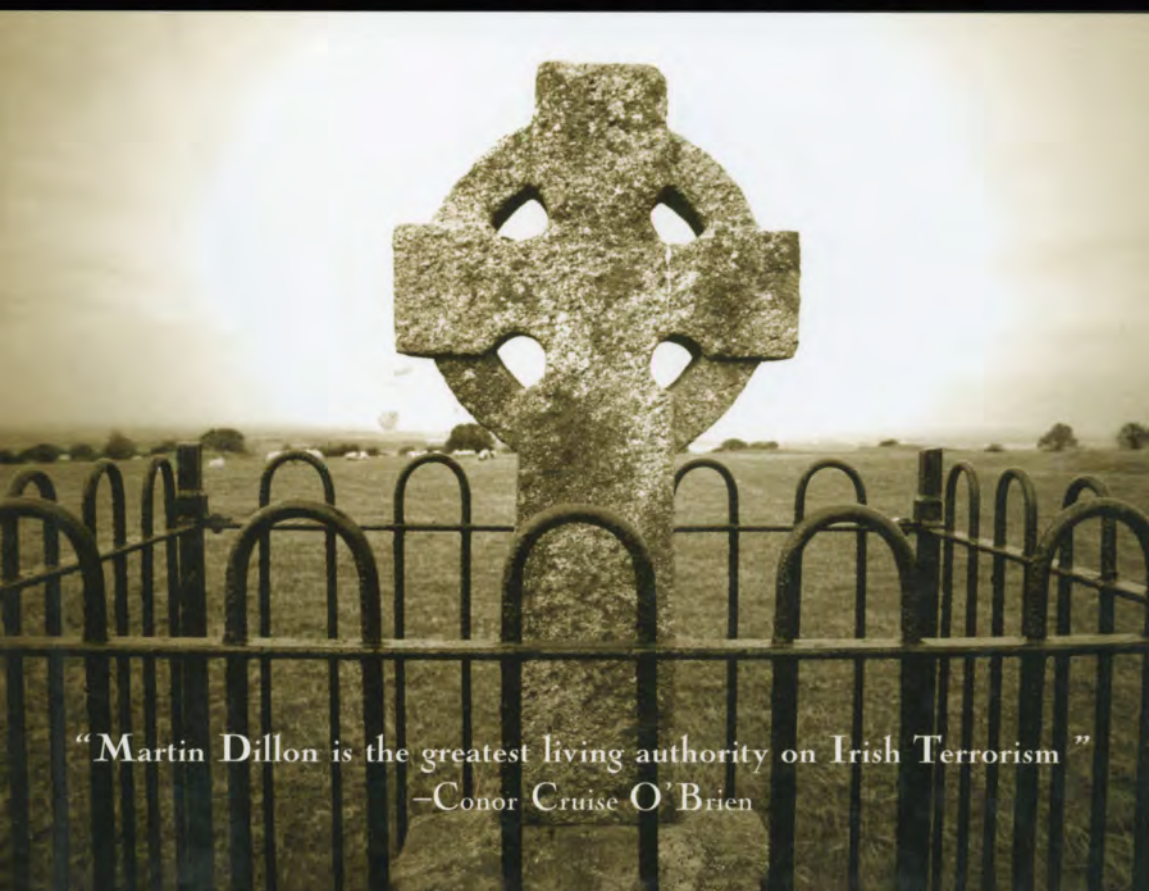


G O D and the G U N

The Church and Irish Terrorism

MARTIN DILLON



"Martin Dillon is the greatest living authority on Irish Terrorism"
—Conor Cruise O'Brien

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The Church and Irish Terrorism

MARTIN DILLON

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To my brother, Patrick, and my late brother-in-law,
Dr Michael Feinberg, and his son, Samuel

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God and the Gun

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INTRODUCTION

Writing about Ireland is never easy as I have discovered over many years of producing countless articles, documentary television programmes and books dealing with the conflict. I am now aware of the difficulties inherent in talking to combatants who, after thirty years of violence, are skilled in the art of propaganda and deception. I spent two decades establishing contacts, many of whom provided me with valuable information on the understanding that they remained anonymous. They ranged from members of the intelligence agencies, to the military and the paramilitaries. The latter provided fascinating insights into the mind of a terrorist. Their reasons for talking to me ranged from self-importance to a desire to have an impact on written history. Some wished to compromise an organisation with which they had become disillusioned. When I decided to write *God and the Gun*, I believed naïvely that my task would be made easier because many of those I intended to interview were clergy on both sides of the tribal divide in Ireland. I soon discovered that it was easier to get terrorists to talk than priests and ministers. It became evident that the Churches, particularly the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, appeared to have greater control of their members than the paramilitary bodies and the Army. The majority of those in religious life were happy to discuss dogma openly but the moment I revealed the nature of my investigations I faced a wall of silence. It was as though talking about the role of religion in terrorism confirmed its place at the centre of the conflict.

God and the Gun

Clergymen were determined to assure me that pulpits had only been used to preach the word of God.

When I requested an interview with Gerry Adams, the president of Sinn Féin, I was told to submit a list of questions that would determine whether he would meet me. For an organisation that seeks media attention and has never before put such an obstacle in my way, it was another example of how the word 'God' instils outright suspicion in paramilitary ranks.

I also met courageous people in the religious life, many of whom must remain anonymous for fear of reprisal by their superiors. They helped me to understand the role of religion in the conflict, the trauma faced by priests who come into close contact with terrorists, and how the word of God is damaged by unhappy alliances between religious figures and the paramilitaries.

Outside Ireland, many people see the conflict as a holy war, and with close examination of the character of the various causes, it is a view not without foundation. For the Protestant community, the slogan 'For God and Ulster' carries the imprimatur of religious conviction and defence of faith. Catholics tend to regard their Protestant counterparts as part of a 'godless, post-Reformation trend'. Catholicism, nationalism and republicanism are interconnected and, in essence, anti-British. The folk tradition of the gun in both communities, carries with it a moral crusade in defence of the respective traditions. Church leaders and politicians have been vocal in their condemnation of violence, but they have not sufficiently demonstrated the true nature of reconciliation, preferring to support their individual constituencies. Nowhere else in Europe has there been so much friction between Churches, such a lack of commitment to the basic Christian principle of 'love thy neighbour', and such callous disrespect for human life. It would be too easy to condemn all churchmen and religious leaders, but it is fair to say that collectively they have allowed the terrorists to fill a vacuum of despair, hatred and suspicion.

Many of those who decided to make a good confession to me

Introduction

recognised the role of negative religious assertions in a long war in which both communities believe that God is on their side.

Some would argue that, in a society in which the young live in ghettos and go to segregated schools, it is impossible to sever the thread of bigotry that permeates life. In 1996, the risk of civil war loomed large after events in a Protestant churchyard at Drumcree. Orangemen and loyalists demanded the right to march triumphantly through a Catholic area to assert their politics and religion. The Gods of Irish nationalism and Unionism were there – and so was the Gun. This book attempts to examine the role of religion in the conflict through the experiences of those in the religious life and within terrorism. The terms ‘loyalist’, ‘nationalist’ and ‘republican’ are shorthand for those who understand the conflict. To an outsider, they are best understood as definitions of the political character of both communities. ‘Loyalist’ has come to signify not simply Protestants loyal to Britain but Protestants of an extreme political variety – hence loyalist paramilitaries – though not all loyalists use violence. ‘Nationalist’ could be applied to the whole Catholic community, indicating the shared desire for a national identity within a united Ireland. Within nationalism is republicanism, which has sought to employ violence to achieve Irish unity.

It is my intention to show that the British Army and military intelligence identified the Catholic Church as an integral part of the conflict and therefore of the enemy. When I was researching this book, I talked to individuals on both sides whose personal stories illustrated the connection between religious conditioning and political violence. I realised quickly that I was dealing with a subject that had so far been unexplored. To my knowledge, no other writer has examined the conscience of the terrorist or the clergyman, and how paramilitaries have reconciled killing with their religious convictions.

Many of those who spoke to me were not prepared to talk on the record and were apprehensive about addressing the issues. Others flatly refused to be interviewed, fearing that their appearance in such a book would compromise them with the organisations to which

they belonged. That was true of clergymen and terrorists. Some were only willing to deal with the subject in an abstract fashion, and tried to convince me that the conflict was simply a constitutional issue in which religion played a minor part. To help the reader deal with the complexities of the Ireland conflict, I have included a Chronology of Major Events, which follows this Introduction. An Appendix of Significant Influences contains details of relevant organisations, movements and leading figures.

I was frightened, saddened and shocked by many of the personal reflections of the people I have written about in this book. In an unholy war, the caricatures of religion starkly reflect the obscene justification of violence. In the course of my research I encountered people who claimed to be 'saved', but in many instances, they had exchanged the army of their tribe for the Army of God. I found it difficult to write this book, perhaps because it deals with a dimension of the conflict which affects all of us who live or have lived in Northern Ireland. It centres on the historical conditioning that resides within the layers of consciousness that have produced a divided society of two tribes with their respective and blunted perceptions of righteousness. It shows how we are all victims. In Northern Ireland, history and religion are more important than in any modern European country. Faith and Fatherland are indivisible ingredients of the conflict and have produced the barbarity historically associated with an unholy war.

CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

1921 King George V opens the first Northern Ireland Parliament.

1922 Northern Ireland experiences widespread sectarian violence resulting in the deaths of over two hundred people and the wounding of a thousand.

1925 The Border, shaped within the terms of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, is confirmed by the Irish Free State and registered with the League of Nations. The two parts of the island are separate.

1931 The Irish Free State government declares the IRA an illegal body.

1949 The Free State becomes a republic and Protestants in Northern Ireland receive constitutional assurances from the British government.

1956 The IRA launches a Border campaign and internment without trial is introduced in both parts of the island.

1962 The IRA campaign is a failure and is called off. The organisation moves towards socialism and away from traditional romantic republicanism of the bomb, bullet and blood sacrifice, which had led to the 1916 Rising against British rule and the subsequent partition of the island.

1963 Terence O'Neill is the new Protestant Unionist prime minister of Northern Ireland. He faces considerable opposition within his own party and from extremists such as the Rev. Ian Paisley. They

oppose his use of the word 'reform' and the first visit of an Irish government leader to Northern Ireland.

1964 There are serious disturbances in parts of Catholic West Belfast after police try to remove a tricolour from the offices of the IRA's political body, Sinn Féin, the 'Divis Street riots'.

1965 Elements within the Protestant community, within organisations such as the Orange Order and the ruling Unionist Party, reactivate the UVF, believing that political concessions to Catholics will lead to a diminution of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom.

1966 The UVF is declared illegal after the shooting dead of a Catholic barman and the wounding of two of his friends.

1967 Catholic nationalists and republicans, including the IRA, form the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and demand basic civil rights, such as one man one vote. The IRA is now pursuing a socialist agenda through its Dublin leadership.

1968 Police and members of the B Specials, a State paramilitary organisation, baton civil-rights marchers in Derry. The events are seen worldwide on television screens. The Unionist government announces reforms, which are deemed inadequate. The Unionist leader, Terence O'Neill, sacks his home affairs minister, William Craig, for opposing reform.

1969 In April, Terence O'Neill resigns under pressure from within his own party and extremists such as Ian Paisley. Tension mounts with bombs at reservoirs, wrongly attributed to the IRA by the government and the police. In fact, the UVF planted the bombs to generate pressure on the State, knowing that the explosions would lead to a crackdown against nationalists.

In August, after three days of rioting, the Northern Ireland police force and the B Specials are unable to cope. British soldiers are deployed in Derry. Further troop deployments are made in Belfast. The troops are in place to protect the Catholic population from Protestant mobs as well as elements of the Northern Ireland security forces.

Traditional republicans blame the socialist leadership of the

Chronology of Major Events

IRA in Dublin for failing to protect Catholics. They point to the refusal of the IRA's Army Council to open arms dumps when Catholic areas were attacked. Many disillusioned IRA men join vigilante organisations, which are funded and supplied by the Irish Republic government.

1970 In April the Ulster Defence Regiment, part of the British Army, comes into service to replace the discredited B Specials.

The IRA splits: traditional republicans blame its socialist trend for leading to its failure to be adequately armed. The traditionalists form the Provisionals, who have the approval of elements within the government of the Irish Republic and the Catholic Church.

In June, the British Labour government is replaced by a Conservative administration led by Edward Heath. His Northern Ireland secretary of state, Reginald Maudling, asks the Army to find a solution to the Troubles. The Army does not wish to fight a war on two fronts and conveniently defines its enemy as the Catholic population. In July, during a thirty-four-hour curfew in the Catholic Lower Falls area of Belfast, the Army is out of control, operating as though it were handling a colonial emergency such as had taken place in Cyprus. During the curfew houses are ransacked and people held in their homes, which alienates the Catholic population, and accords a major boost to recruitment for the new Provisional IRA.

The SDLP (Social Democratic Labour Party) is formed, a major change within the Catholic community.

1971 In February, the Provisionals kill the first soldier, a nineteen-year-old gunner, Robert Curtis.

In March, a Provisional IRA unit from the Ardoyne area of North Belfast abducts three young Scottish soldiers, two of them brothers. They are lured from a bar by women with promises of a party. Outside Belfast they are murdered while urinating at the side of a road.

Disillusioned with the British government's reluctance to take tough action, the Unionist prime minister, Major Chichester-Clark, resigns and is replaced by Brian Faulkner. He persuades the

British government to permit him to introduce internment without trial, aimed at the Catholic population despite the presence of violent men in the Protestant community. Three hundred and fifty people are lifted in the initial internment raid, many of whom are not members of the IRA. The introduction of internment takes place against a background of poor intelligence and outdated files on both wings of the IRA, the Officials and the Provisionals. The one-sided nature of internment, and the fact that student leaders and trade unionists are among those arrested, fuels resentment among Catholics. The outdated files on the IRA mean that the new Provisional IRA leadership is not targeted. Widespread violence follows, with the emergence of the Ulster Defence Association, a paramilitary body formed from Protestant vigilante groupings.

On 4 December, the UVF kills fifteen Catholics in a bomb attack on McGurk's Bar in Belfast, but the Army blames the IRA, describing the incident as an 'own goal', implying that the IRA had a bomb in the bar that detonated prematurely. No effort is made by the security forces to investigate Protestant paramilitary involvement. The mass killing is only attributed to the UVF a decade later.

1972 On 30 January, Bloody Sunday, the British Army Parachute Regiment shoot dead thirteen innocent civilians after a civil-rights march in Derry. A fourteenth dies later.

In March, the British government reacts to international condemnation of Bloody Sunday by imposing direct rule on Northern Ireland from London. The ruling Unionist Party is left without its majority-rule government in Northern Ireland. Loyalist paramilitaries react viciously, killing innocent Catholics.

In June, after secret meetings between the Provisionals and the British government, the IRA declares a ceasefire. Secret talks take place between IRA leaders and representatives of the British government at a house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. Among the Provisionals present is the young Gerry Adams, released on licence from the Long Kesh internment camp. The meeting is

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inconclusive and coincides with tensions in Belfast and an end to the IRA ceasefire. The IRA blames the British Army for provoking events in West Belfast, which contributed to the end of the truce, and in retaliation bombs nine civilian targets in Belfast, killing nine innocent people. The event becomes known as Bloody Friday.

1973 Five tons of arms bound for the IRA are seized off the Irish coast.

1974 Brian Faulkner leads a new power-sharing administration of Unionists and nationalists. It is opposed by many Protestants, including loyalist paramilitaries: they see it as leading to the involvement of the Irish government in the affairs of Northern Ireland. A workers' strike follows, in which loyalist paramilitaries have a prominent role. Massive intimidation stops people going to work, and loyalists control power supplies. The British government is advised by the Army that it could not hold the line against a Protestant rebellion. Unionist members of the power-sharing government resign and it collapses. Catholic members feel betrayed by the British refusal to confront the loyalist paramilitaries.

Bombs explode in the Irish Republic, killing twenty-seven people. The Irish security forces believe that the bombs were planted by loyalists acting in collusion with elements of British military intelligence. Before the end of the year, the Provisional IRA kills twenty-four in the bombing of pubs at Guildford and Birmingham on the British mainland.

1975-6 Another 550 people are killed in continuing violence.

1977 A loyalist strike, orchestrated by Ian Paisley, fails because the British government is well prepared.

1978 The European Court of Human Rights rules that the British Army used inhuman and degrading tactics against internees in the 1971 internment round-up. It also rules that the treatment did not amount to torture.

1979 The violence continues, and the Irish National Liberation Army kills Airey Neave, the Conservative Party's shadow

secretary of state for Northern Ireland. A bomb explodes as he drives out of the House of Commons car park in London.

On 20 August the Provisionals kill eighteen soldiers at Warrenpoint and, in a separate operation, murder Earl Mountbatten of Burma.

1980 Northern Ireland's prisons, always a place of controversy, experience a fifty-three-day hunger strike by republicans, demanding the restoration of political prisoner status to IRA prisoners. An apparent concession is made that they may wear civilian clothing. When the prisoners realise that it will be issued by the authorities, they feel they have been duped. This provides the basis for a second, more serious hunger strike.

1981 On 1 March, Bobby Sands, a convicted Provisional, begins a new hunger strike. He and others make five demands: the right to wear their own clothes; to refrain from prison work; to associate freely; to have one letter, visit and parcel per week; and for lost remission time to be fully restored. On 5 May, Sands dies on the sixty-sixth day of his fast. Widespread disorder follows, and the deaths of nine more hunger strikers. Under pressure from Catholic priests and families, the republican prisoners call off the hunger strike. Three days later Margaret Thatcher's government, until then intractable on the prisoners' demands, agrees that they can wear their own clothes and that 50 per cent remission will be restored if they abide by prison rules.

In November, the Democratic Unionist Party of Ian Paisley announces the formation of a 'Third Force', and in a loyalist day of protest, 5,000 men march in a military-style parade before him.

1982 As a result of the support for republicans during the hunger strike, the Provisional IRA's political wing, Sinn Féin, emerges as an electoral force. In local elections, Sinn Féin polls 10.1 per cent of the vote.

The IRA bombing campaign continues on the British mainland, with the deaths of nine soldiers of the Household Cavalry.

A major controversy follows the deaths of six people at the

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hands of undercover police squads supported by military intelligence. Allegations of a police shoot-to-kill policy lead to the Stalker Inquiry.

1983 In June, Gerry Adams, president of Provisional Sinn Féin, wins the West Belfast seat in Westminster elections.

1984 Allegations of a British government shoot-to-kill policy continue. Seven tons of arms bound for the IRA from the Libyan President Colonel Gaddafi are seized from a trawler off the west coast of Ireland.

On 12 October, the IRA almost succeeds in wiping out the British cabinet in a bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton, where the Conservative Party is holding its annual conference.

On 14 December, the first British Army soldier is convicted of murdering a civilian while on duty. He is sentenced to life but serves only twenty-six months, and is released to rejoin the Army.

1985 The IRA kills nine policemen in a mortar attack on Newry police station. The banning of an Orange march through the Catholic tunnel area of Portadown leads to violent confrontation between the security forces and loyalists.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement is signed between the British government, led by Margaret Thatcher, and the Irish government led by Dr Garret Fitzgerald. Unionists proclaim it a sell-out.

1986 On 3 March, a day of action by loyalists, to protest against the Anglo-Irish Agreement, leads to violence.

Weeks later, loyalists and police clash in Portadown when an attempt is made to stop Apprentice Boys marching through a Catholic area. During the violence, twenty-year-old Keith White is the first Protestant to be killed by a plastic bullet. Fifteen Catholics had already died in this way.

During the summer, more violence erupts from loyalists after the rerouting of Orange parades in Portadown.

In November, Ian Paisley, wearing a red beret, appears at a secret paramilitary-style rally in Belfast's Ulster Hall, signalling the emergence of a new paramilitary organisation, Ulster Resistance.

God and the Gun

A video of the rally is obtained by *World in Action* and shown on television.

1987 French customs seize 150 tons of weapons and explosives bound for the Provisional IRA. The seizure is made on the coaster *Exsund*, which left Libya *en route* to the west coast of Ireland. Three previous shipments had got through undetected.

On 11 November an IRA bomb explodes without warning at a Remembrance Day parade in Enniskillen, killing eleven people and injuring sixty-three.

1988 Police seize a large quantity of guns bound for loyalist paramilitaries, including Ulster Resistance. The Irish government expresses dismay at the refusal of the British attorney general, Sir Patrick Mayhew (later secretary of state for Northern Ireland) to prosecute eleven police officers named in the report resulting from the Stalker Inquiry in connection with a shoot-to-kill policy. Sir Patrick Mayhew uses national security as a reason for not proceeding against the officers.

On 6 March, under orders from the British government, the SAS shoot dead three unarmed IRA members in Gibraltar. The British government claims that the three left a bomb in Gibraltar but this is found to be untrue. At the Belfast funerals of the three, a loyalist gunman, Michael Stone, kills three mourners. His intention had been to assassinate leading provisionals in attendance. Three days later, at the funeral of one of Stone's victims, two undercover Army soldiers are dragged from their car by mourners and beaten to death. The mob savagery is captured on television.

In the following months fifteen soldiers are murdered in attacks within Holland, Britain and Northern Ireland.

In October, the British government bans Sinn Fein from using the broadcast media.

1989 On 12 February, a Catholic solicitor, Pat Finucane, is shot dead by loyalists. There is little doubt that British military intelligence knew he had been targeted: one of their prime agents

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was chief of UDA intelligence, the organisation that carried out the killing.

In April, three members of Ulster Resistance are arrested in Paris and accused of trying to exchange missile parts for weapons. Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party announces that it severed its links with Ulster Resistance soon after the organisation was set up.

By the end of August, a new controversy surrounds allegations of collusion between members of the security forces and loyalist paramilitaries. Such claims had been made before but on this occasion a BBC reporter, Chris Moore, is shown security forces' documents by loyalists. An English policeman, John Stevens, is asked to investigate. His inquiry offices, within a secure building, are mysteriously fire-bombed.

In October, the IRA kills ten Royal Marines bandsmen at Deal in Kent. The London Court of Appeal overturns as unsafe the convictions of four Irishmen who had served fifteen years for the 1974 Guildford pub bombings.

1990 Undercover soldiers shoot dead three members of a criminal gang, reviving allegations of a shoot-to-kill policy. The overall death toll to this point in the Northern Ireland Troubles is 2,781.

1991 The IRA continues its campaign of bombing and killing in Britain.

In March, the 'Birmingham Six' are released after their second appeal in sixteen years. As with the Guildford Four, an example of serious miscarriage of justice has been uncovered.

Loyalist paramilitaries murder seven people in two separate attacks.

In April, British government census figures claim that Catholics represent 38.4 per cent of the Northern Ireland population. The figures are regarded as unreliable because a large number of people refused to state their religion.

In June, an Irish family, the Maguires, are cleared by the London Court of Appeal after serving sentences ranging from four to fourteen years.