

Daly takes fellow bishops to task

Desmond Fisher | Nov. 28, 2011

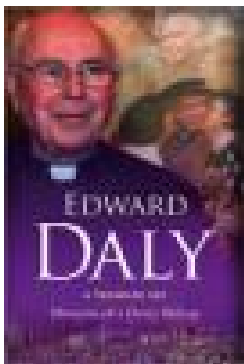


In October 2010, Bishop Edward Daly holds a portrait of Jackie Duddy, who was shot dead in 1972 in the Bogside area of Derry, Northern Ireland, on "Bloody Sunday." (AP/Niall Carson)

ANALYSIS

Google "Bloody Sunday 1972" and the Wikipedia entry will show you a camera shot no one who saw it on television that Jan. 30 will ever forget. It was of a Catholic priest in the Bogside area of Derry in Northern Ireland. It shows him crouching down and waving a bloodstained white handkerchief. Behind him come four men carrying a dying man out of the range of British soldiers who that day shot 26 innocent protestors, 14 of whom died.

The priest was Fr. Edward Daly, who later became bishop of Derry from 1974 to 1993. His book *A Troubled See: Memoirs of a Derry Bishop* has just been published by Four Courts Press.



What distinguishes his account is that he puts the blame for what are disparagingly called the

"Troubles" -- more than 3,500 people were killed between 1968 and 1998 -- on the Irish Republican Army, the British and Northern Ireland authorities, and, in part, on the Catholic bishops themselves.

Himself a simple priest before his ordination to the episcopate, he found the great majority of his fellow bishops in both parts of Ireland to be theologians, canon lawyers, teachers and administrators, 75 percent of them drawn from these professions, which account for 20 percent of all priests. He was the first bishop of Derry in the 20th century not to have been president of Derry's diocesan college.

After 20 years of conflict, Daly censured his fellow bishops for not answering charges that the Irish church was backing the stronger side as it always had done in Ireland. Nor had the church issued a statement on the morality of the British presence in Ireland.

"I believe," he wrote, "that we must formulate and communicate a theology of struggle against oppression, a theology of nonviolent struggle, a theology of justice, a theology of tolerance and accommodation of different ideals and ideas specifically addressed to our situation."

He proposed meetings between the bishops and the different Northern parties, particularly Sinn Féin, and with the three Northern Protestant churches. He was a powerful and frequent critic of the IRA's violence. His most outspoken attack was in 1990 when the IRA strapped a Catholic man to a van, forced him to drive it to a British checkpoint and exploded the van by remote control, killing the driver and five British soldiers.

In his homily at the driver's funeral Mass, Daly called it "an act of unspeakable cruelty. These are the fruits of the Provisional IRA -- by their fruits you shall know them. ... They corrupt every thing and every person they touch."

On politics he has always been strongly in favor of Irish unity, yet he challenges the assumptions that Irishness equates with Catholicism, and vice versa, and doubts the accepted wisdom that 99 percent of Northern Catholics favor a united Ireland.

[Desmond Fisher is a former editor of *The Catholic Herald*, London, and a former head of current affairs at Radió Telefís Éireann.]

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