

Prayer Focus — May 2007

“I will heal their land.”

Who would have believed that it was ever possible – the coming together of Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to form a Northern Ireland Assembly! I personally find it very hard to know what to make of it all. On the one hand, we have been praying for such a day, yet on the other, I think of Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish builders in Luke 6: 46-49. Jesus was telling them and us, that we need to build on His words if we want to build a house on a solid foundation, that will withstand the pressures and storms of this life. I am sure this principle also applies to our corporate lives both in Church and in Society.

It seems to me that the Northern Irish electorate could have been endorsing 3 things:

1. We are tired of an Assembly that is not functioning and not “producing the goods” on daily “bread and butter” issues. We are also tired of what appears to be Westminster penalising us for not doing so.
2. Sinn Fein received a further endorsement of their mandate for a United Ireland.
3. The DUP are also saying that they have increased and strengthened their mandate to maintain the union with Britain.

Regarding the first of these, it is great to see the possibility of all parties getting around the table regarding local political and social issues. This could also be said regarding the negative spiritual spin-off for Northern Ireland over the SORs debate – i.e. we might have had a very different outcome if the Assembly had been functioning! Also, sitting together and having to make joint decisions for Northern Ireland and our relationship with the Irish Republic can only be good, providing the possibility of breaking down fears, suspicions, etc., of each other.

As for the other two points, these are related to the foundations I mentioned above. As I wrote in my last Prayer Focus, the centuries old history on which both SF & DUP are established – including the Covenants of 1912 and 1916 – led to the building of a foundation in the Assembly which has a deep fault line running through it. Can the house currently being built at Stormont survive the certain storms in the days ahead?

This issue of foundations was highlighted for me as I prepared to lead a day of prayer last weekend in Portadown entitled – “Breaking free from the chains of our history”. The Inter-church Prayer Group there have been praying for Portadown faithfully over many years, but they were still sensing a strong resistance to spiritual breakthrough in the town, evidenced in the Church by ongoing divisions, and in the town by growing social problems in homes and among young people.

Someone recently gave me a definition of the word “stronghold”, which they were told came from the Hebrew, “moving forward by looking back”. This is certainly a good description of what they began to feel – that something in the history, the foundation of the town, needed praying into. And sure enough, through historical research they found that much of what epitomises the sectarian division in this land is rooted there. Very early on in its formation there was bloodshed – supposedly in the name of Christ. Surely what is spoken of Cain’s killing of Abel – *“Your brother’s blood cries out from the ground”* (Gen. 4:10) is applicable today in situations like this. And the same would be true in others, like abortion.

A thumbnail history.

The original land on which Portadown is established once belonged to the Irish Catholic people. After the Flight of the Earls in 1607, King James I confiscated approximately six of the nine Ulster Counties – and so the Plantation of Ulster began. 2000 acres of this land south of Lough Neagh was given to an English Anglican planter, and so Portadown began its development. In 1641, relatives of Hugh O’Neill (Flight of the Earls) led a series of revolts including the sacking of Portadown and the drowning of Protestants in the

River Bann. The hatred and animosity of the two people groups, divided by-and-large along ethnic and Catholic/Protestant lines, continued to unfold a few years later when Cromwell killed many Catholics in most brutal ways in retaliation for the deaths of Protestants in 1641. In 1784, during the process of relaxing the Penal Laws, local agrarian societies (Catholic 'Defenders' and Protestant 'Peep-O-Day Boys') fought over land and commerce issues. This resulted in the massacre of Catholics in the Battle of the Diamond, Loughall (on the outskirts of Portadown). The Orange Order was formed after that battle! This is something of the historical backdrop to the Drumcree/Garvaghy Road crisis!

Thoughts from the day

During that Prayer Day in Portadown, following a very anointed time of worship, I gave a teaching on this issue of breakthrough, looking at the need to understand and own our history (local and national). This is at the core of the word **Confession** (meaning: to state the truth, acknowledge the sin, the unjust actions of self or the people group we belong to). This is what Nehemiah did: "*I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you.*" (ch 1:6). How can we work towards and pray for spiritual breakthrough/healing in our communities, if we do not make an attempt to understand both sides/interpretations of our history, so as to discern whether or not Satan has been given legal footholds in our identities/psyches to operate off?

We then went on to look at the subject of **Repentance** which flows out of confession. While we cannot repent for someone else's sin, there is a very real sense, that at a corporate level, if someone sins against another, the effects of that (the iniquity) passes on to the ensuing generations. If we take that iniquity and commit a sin in that area ourselves, we become part of something generational/collective – their sin becomes not only my sin but it also becomes our sin. At this level we can repent for our own sin and for the collective sin, and the effects it has had generationally on another person/people group.

An understanding of this dynamic, known as Indentificational Repentance, enables us to move into a very deep place of prayer regarding the wounds we have inflicted on each other. E.g. What must it have been like at the time of the Plantation for an Irish Catholic family to be evicted from their home, see it being burned down, have their livestock taken from and be left homeless and destitute? It did not justify their collective response in 1641, but understanding their pain does help us — in the light of the trail of subsequent events that flowed out of that time to the present day - when we come together before God as Christians from both sides of the divide, to seek His face for the healing of ancient wounds. This is central to the scripture: "*If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land.*" (2 Chron. 7:14)

In the afternoon, we entered into our priestly ministering by coming up into "the gap" before God in intercession. Gathered there were people from the Catholic/nationalist, English and from, English/Scottish Planter stock. Together, in the light of what I mentioned above, we could in identification with our people groups, confess to one another and repent of our collective sins (current and historic). As I mentioned in my book "Heal not Lightly", the breaking of the power of the "Spirit of Drumcree" was done in a similar way. Dare we believe that through this day in Portadown other things were broken in the Heavenly realms over that whole Community?

As the day progressed, I had a strong sense in my spirit – wouldn't it be wonderful if in town after town across Ireland we could stand before God together and do this? Just a few days later I had a phone call from a lady who felt God was asking her to do just that, for her town. She had already started doing the historical research. Is God prompting something in your heart regarding this for your town? If so, do get in touch with us. We, along with a number of others in the Prayer Movement here in Ireland, would love to stand with you in seeing if such a day could be organised with you and others for your town.

Harry Smith.

“Hungry We Come” Day
5th May 2007
(10.30am—4.00pm)

A team from **Transformations Ireland** will lead the day and share about the **Global Day of Prayer** gatherings on Pentecost Sunday.

Worship: David Gourley.

Come along, bring a friend and a sandwich!!
Tea and Coffee provided.