

CHAPTER 1

IS THERE AN ANSWER TO POLARISATION, HATRED AND BITTERNESS?

"My workman let the gunman into the house, who then shot dead my brother-in-law as he lay in bed." "I was the Vet who attended the annuals of the farmer who was shot dead." "My teacher had a six hour operation and sixteen pints of blood following an explosion in a dress shop." "My cousin who had a weak heart, was made to stand with his hands against the wall for three hours and had his nose broken by a soldier when he turned around." "Is any torture too much if it leads to the prevention of a bomb being planted in a public place?"

The above comments I heard as I travelled in the North of Ireland in 1971 and talked to people about the violence between ethnic groups there. While I might win the argument that the Biblical and Christian attitude to violence should be the Quaker testimony that; "All War is Inconsistent with the Spirit and teaching of Christ," I soon found that I had no power to free people from the gall of bitterness and fear which gipped their lives. (More important, I felt this fear gripping my own heart when faced with the fact that I had to pass a hotel with a bomb planted in it in order to reach my car.).

I tried to ease tension in Ireland in the early 70's by my own efforts at two levels:-

1. Studying the constitution of the Republic of Ireland to see what parts were objectionable to Protestants in Northern Ireland.
2. Trying to convince people that the Christian way is the way of love.

While I was trying to enlighten people on the Biblical basis of the Quaker testimony against war, it pleased God to step into my life in an unexpected way. At the end of September 1971, I was speaking at a Quaker Quarterly Meeting held in Lurgan, Co. Armagh. Richard

Hall, an American Quaker from Barnesville, Ohio, U.S.A. was also there fulfilling in the Lord's time, a call he had had (as a poor farm boy in Ohio to fly from inland America) to visit Quakers in England and Ireland. His daughter, Marjorie (now better known as Marj) accompanied him on this visit. Having eyed her across the room during the meeting and realising there were few young people there, I introduced myself to her. Little did I know that she had heard of me earlier and wanted to meet me! We found ourselves communicating at a deep level while we shared tea together. Unknown to each other, we both prayed individually that night that if it was right, we would have an opportunity to talk the next day. The opportunity was not long in coming and after exchanging smiles across the room at Bessbrook Meeting House during lunch, I asked her to go fora walk around the beautiful grounds of The Woodhouse and Deramore House. My fluttering heart calmed a little as we shared many thoughts with each other and popped blackberries into each others mouths. (Marj did not let on that she did not like blackberries!) Before parting, we exchanged addresses, then went back for the afternoon meeting. Marj recalls that after that meeting, Kenneth Hobson, one of the Friends present made the remark to her: "Well, I guess we'll be seeing you in Ireland again soon!" She replied: "Maybe you will and maybe you won't." In her heart she wondered.... December found me full of tension and anxiety about the violence in Ireland and travelling to see Marj in Barnesville, looking forward to our first kiss and a warm welcome. Marj's home is a white clap-board house standing alongside a dirt road and overlooking a steep, sloping valley. Below the house stands the old barn and both the house and barn were partially built from hand cut timber, Oak beams with mortice and Tenon joints, before the days of circular saws. I stood and listened as a cow, deprived of her young calf, moored discontentedly and her cries echoed across the snow covered hillsides. In the peacefulness of that setting, God began to draw me back to Himself, out of a wilderness of spiritual drought. The Lord had been preparing Marj to play a role in my own rejuvenation through a series of events which took place sometime before my arrival in America. A friend of Marj's has been exploring the writings of Edgar

Cace and had an interest in such things as re-incarnation and other related subjects. While Marj had never had any enlightenment on these subjects as to whether they were of God or not, she never-the-less felt a "Check" inside and prayed a simple prayer; "Lord, if she is right, show me, if she is wrong, change her." Two years later this friend, Sharon, was at a prayer meeting where the gifts of the Holy Spirit were in operation and the Lord spoke clearly to her, telling her to close all doors on those things she had been involved in for it was from the devil. She obeyed and the Lord transformed her life. Through the prayerful help of this friend, Marj came into a fuller experience of the power of the Holy Spirit and so desired the same for me. Through Marj's testimony of these events and the quiet of her Quaker home, the Lord turned me around to see that healing in Ireland would not come by "might" or by "power" but by God's Spirit. (Zech. 4v6)

I too, began to seek a fresh and deeper infilling of the Holy Spirit and while visiting Marj's friend, Sharon one day, I asked for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. (Lk. 11v13) Sharon said she felt from the Lord that I would be filled but not just then. (Eph. 5v18).

As my main reason for going to Ohio was to see if Marj would consent to marry me at some stage, we walked into the jeweller's shop in Barnesville one day and purchased two gold bands. We still dispute as to when we started to wear them, but committed to each other we certainly became. My father announced our engagement to the family in Ireland on Christmas day 1971. I was in love with Marj and she accepted my proposal as an act of faith, believing it was the right thing to do. Her parents supported her in the decision. Soon after our engagement, the way opened for Marj and I to go to a-meeting of the Bair Foundation, a Holy Spirit work among difficult teenagers through Christian "Love" homes (foster homes¹). The meeting was held in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania on the first of January, 1972. As I sat in that meeting, my heart was full of longing and openness to God and the gifts of the Spirit. (1 Cor. 12v1-11). I could hardly wait for the meeting to

¹ Love is an open door by Bill Bair. Story of the Bair Foundation work with difficult teenagers. Published by Chosen Books. Distributed by Fleming H Revell Company Old Tappan, New Jersey U.S.A.

end so I could go forward to be prayed with. One man came and spoke to me and I went with him and several others to a side room for prayer. I sat down and after sharing briefly, several people laid -hands on me (Acts 8v17; 19v6) and prayed, some in English some in Tongues. I was encouraged to open my mouth and pray in tongues also I did speak a few strange words, but they seemed artificial to me.

Looking back now, I can see the radical transformation that began at It time. After the prayer, some people shared with me that they had fellowship with Roman Catholics who were also blessed in the Holy Spirit and furthermore, I would see similar openings in Ireland. My reaction was; "blathers!" "That's all right in America," I said, "but Ireland is different!" Marj also felt in the Spirit that I would have a ministry among Roman Catholics in Ireland but I did not really believe it until the Lord took over. So with these things to ponder and wonder about, we drove back to a friend's house for the night. I felt a new and deep peace my heart and when I was alone in bed that night, the Holy Spirit was released in me and I found great liberty to pray in tongues. (1 Cor. 14v15)

So Marj and I parted, not knowing when we would meet again — I carrying with me Marj's prayer to the people of Ireland.

TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

Politics won't solve your problems

Only God can change the heart.

Man can try in his own wisdom

Better wisdom to impart.

*But man's human nature's selfish
Bred with bitterness and greed
Only God with perfect wisdom,
Can impart a perfect seed.*

*So I challenge you to face this
With an open heart and soul
Jesus Christ has all the answers
And can make your nation whole.*

*Yes I know you'll think it easy
For a person not involved,
To think up all the answers
To get another's problems solved.*

*You ask me if I was involved
Would this same answer give?
I pray to God that it shall be
As long as I shall live.*

*And when I come to this your land;
I hope not yours, but God's
That I shall live what I believe
And not be as the clods.*

*I send my deepest love to you
I'll keep you in my prayers
And may our God of heaven and earth,
Bring joy to your years.
(Marjorie Hall - December 30th, 1971).*

I had not long to wait before I would see the Lord begin to open new and unexpected doors of opportunity.