

26 ALLIANCES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The issue of this paper is: How do people from different traditions come together? Seen from this angle, of course, the title could be: Getting peace between people in Northern Ireland. How do people find peace? Nevertheless, in the examples, which will be given, peace is much more the result than the origin of the meeting of people. Peace is a result, not the goal. It could very well be, that mostly this is the case. So often, we all have the experience, seeking peace results in war.

1. **First example: A Protestant and a Roman Catholic Woman**

In a working class, predominantly Protestant neighbourhood a Protestant, working class, married woman becomes befriended with a Roman Catholic, lower middle class married woman. Of course they like each other. Although jokes are made about them by their own families, anyway by the family of the Protestant woman, the friendship endures. What is really going on?

The Protestant woman is originally lower middle class and feels, not really at home in the working class neighbourhood, she came in through her marriage. The Roman Catholic woman married a lower middle class Roman Catholic. She lived in a working class Protestant neighbourhood. She too feels excluded from the neighbourhood and the atmosphere she belongs to. They are both strangers in the place they live. The Roman Catholic woman comes from the Republic, which accentuates her being displaced.

Both women have more in common. They are housewives. They care for the house and their child. Their daily life is in fact identical. So they get befriended. The jokes they are exposed to confirm for them their predicament and the value of the friendship. The Roman Catholic woman respects the pious Protestantism of her friend. The Protestant woman becomes the freedom, because she is together with her friend, to go with her to the Chapel.

They meet because both are, feel displaced. They recognise each other. The recognizing each other brings them together. They have peace together. That one is a Roman Catholic, the other a Protestant, is in fact fortuitous. They are scapegoated because this is the case, but in fact it strengthens their bond, because it accentuates their being displaced.

2. **Suburbia**

Probably one of the reasons that Protestants and Roman Catholics in suburbia can get along very well has to do with the same realities. Most of them are of working class or lower middle class origins. They came to University or to other educational possibilities and in fact left their original (sub) culture. They are displaced and isolated, as the two women were. Their lives at home are identical. Outside maybe they rival like mad, but in suburbia they are exactly the same. They live together in peace, not although one is Protestant and the other Roman Catholic, let alone because they are. What they have in common is much more important than the differences. And so, the respect and the understanding of the differences may grow.

3. The unhappy Protestant and the unhappy Catholic

A Protestant who is not very happy with the staunchness of so many fellow-Protestants, who “feels ecumenically”, gets along very well with Catholics who are reacting on their own church in the same manner. Being ecumenical means in fact, not to recognise those of the other sides as fellow Christians, carrying with them important possibilities, following out of the obedience to the Gospel, the Lord, but to recognise in the other the wish to have something new, the unhappiness with everything as it goes. They find peace because they have, exactly as the two women, described in 1, difficulties with the situation they are in. That the unhappiness is about being a Roman Catholic and a Protestant in a world in which the expectations how to be a good one discord with their own wishes, is secondary, although extremely important in its consequences.

What is in fact going on? Both have their conscious position, in which they reject the manner in which their co-religionists are. Out of that reason, they recognise each other. But there is too their “shadow”, their hidden side. If that was not the case, they would not be unhappy with the situation. They would not seek alliances, which confront them. In fact they project their shadow on their opponents. The aspects of their being a Protestant or a Roman Catholic that they don't like, which they reject, they find in their opponents and they fight against them, in fact fighting against themselves, by fighting against bigotry, moralism, hardness, and all these things they see in the people they belong to.

4. Where is the peace?

Having peace and, more so, finding peace is unexpected manners, with unexpected people, is very beautiful. If this peace is found by scapegoating others, then of course there come big questions. In all the three cases, peace is found by scapegoating. The Protestant woman scapegoats her in-laws. The Roman Catholic woman whose husband who brought her into the situation? The whole Northern Ireland situation? The new middle classes in fact all they left behind them. The unhappy Protestant scapegoats the “staunch” Protestants around him, as the Roman Catholic his staunch co-religionists. This peace in fact is so deeply cultural. From this peace there is still a way to go to real peace, without the violence, which is hidden behind this one.