

Fractured In The Fight

‘A house divided against itself will fall.’ (LK 11:17)

Newsreels of the 1960’s and 70’s depict Belfast Ireland as a war-zone; as a child growing up in front of TV, I recall coils of barbed wire separating Protestant and Catholic zones, over which both sides lobbed bombs at each other, often shattering innocent lives.

I returned to a much calmer Belfast last week to help address the shattering of gender identity in the United Kingdom (UK). Post-Christian Britain is a colder, harder place than the USA when it comes to healing the gender disordered. UK power structures (in both government and church) make it less controversial to undergo a sex change than to help same-sex strugglers become chaste and open to life with the opposite gender.

The renewed church must fight to uphold the integrity of what it means to be human: made in Jesus’ image as male and female.

Yet we are fractured in that fight. Belfast arises on the broken ground of a divided church. The schism between Protestant and Catholic there may have calmed but is not healed. And that rift fans out like fissures throughout Protestant churches. My first trip to Belfast a decade earlier was marked by division: our host church was hemorrhaging and the local Vineyard Church had all but exploded.

As soon as we arrived in Belfast this time, I learned that our host church had suffered a deep divide between pastor and several elders. As I considered how I might address the wounded church on Sunday (I had been invited to do so), I was uninvited. Apparently, the pastor felt it unwise that a Catholic address his church. Not a mortal wound; I am now accustomed to doors closing on me in some conservative evangelical circles.

But as I considered this closed door, I could feel the strong desire to close my heart to that church. The road goes down and down. My heart wove together several offenses I held toward that denomination for its persistent anti-Catholic views. And I judged that particular church as petty and rude, underserving of my offering.

God used divided hearts to expose my divided heart. I had to work out the barricade in me; I had to forgive my judges in order to freely offer hope for that church as a healing community.

As we arrived at the church for the day-long conference, we had to cross a barrier formed by 80 protesters, beautiful and broken self-identified gays and lesbians. I thought: ‘How can we as the people of God offer wholeness to the gender broken when we are so divided towards our fellow Christians?’

After our day of joyful testimony and truth, an anti-Catholic congregant texted our host: 'Tell the Catholic that he brought living water to me today.'

Let it be so, O God. Unite us, one divide at a time. May we be open to your whole body for the purpose of making known the whole truth of how You restore Your broken humanity. Identify and pull up our church divides. Authenticate our call to heal those living in darkness, behind barricades of gender brokenness and misbegotten 'rights.'

'He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.'

(Eph. 2: 17, 18)