

# Recent Christian Religious Wars

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## UNHOLY SMOKE

By G. W. Target

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1969 127 pp \$1.95

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For an Irishman, George Target is curiously apolitical — even antipolitical. “I have very little interest in either a ‘United Ireland’ or the ‘Freedom of the Six Loyal Counties of Ulster’ ” (p. 9), he states early in his brief paperback on recent “troubles” in Northern Ireland. He feels that most politicians are “sick in the head for power or simply . . . wicked men on the make” (p. 10). So Target warns his readers not to expect any simple solutions in *Unholy Smoke*. Truth as complex as it really happens is what he promises. “So as it comes, then, as it happened and happens, sights, sounds, words, smells, agonies, people . . . *The People, Yes!*” (p. 20).

The allusion to Sandburg’s rambling, patchwork poem is appropriate, for Target also writes in a quilt style. He writes a few paragraphs in one direction, throws in a line of asterisks, and is off on a different tack. Like Sandburg’s, too, his rhetoric is excellent when it hits the mark, and a little embarrassing when occasionally it doesn’t.

Catholics in Ulster view themselves as an oppressed minority; and Protestant Seventh-day Adventist Target sees that they do have much to be unhappy about. There is the extensive gerrymandering of local election districts, a self-perpetuating “fiddle” because “Unionist Councils ‘usually allocate houses to Catholics’ only in ‘Catholic wards lest the voting pattern be upset’ ” (p. 37). This combination of vote and housing inequity, plus job discrimination, forms the basis of the civil rights protest in Northern Ireland.

On the other hand, Target says, many civil rights advocates have objectives beyond ending anti-Catholic discrimination. They are supposed at heart to desire an Ireland united under “Home Rule,” and this frightens many Orangemen, because to them it means “Rome Rule.”

(Two features of Northern Ireland’s system of law enforcement should also be mentioned for an understanding of the crisis. First is the Special Powers Act, about which Target quotes a Sheffield University professor: “ ‘British citizens in Ulster can be arrested without warrant, denied recourse to law, flogged, denied trial by jury, and if a British citizen so incarcerated without trial dies in prison, the Ulster government can refuse the right of inquest’ ” (p. 30). In addition, there are the B-Specials, an auxiliary police force that is all-Protestant and variously called a lawless mob or saviours of the community.)

Target begins his history of recent disturbances with the account of an unauthorized Londonderry protest march (October 5, 1968) which police vigorously broke up, sending a participating Labor MP to the hospital with injuries from a cop’s club. Afterward the Stormont government blamed the news media and outside agitators, and a blue-ribbon investigating commission found there may have been something of a police riot.

Perhaps the most shocking of the ensuing incidents described in *Unholy Smoke* is the Burntollet Bridge affair and related violence in January of last year. A small and peaceable civil rights march from Belfast to Londonderry suffered several attacks from Protestant vigilantes, culminating in a large ambush at Burntollet Bridge outside Londonderry. Defenseless men and women, reports Target, were attacked by mobs armed with stones, sticks, and even nail-studded clubs. Police were ineffective, to say the least, in halting the violence.

Indicative of official attitude is the answer given to an interviewer as to whether assailants were armed. "There were no arms out there that I could see," said the man in charge of an Orange Hall where many of the counter-demonstrators met. "As a justice of the peace I could not put up with that. Plenty of sticks and cudgels, yes, but arms — certainly not" (p. 56).

After Burntollet, the situation in Northern Ireland deteriorated even further. Serious rioting broke out on several occasions in Londonderry and Belfast, featuring sabotage reminiscent of the outlawed Irish Republican Army, Protestant arson, sniping, and police gassing of mobs. Eventually, British troops intervened in cities by then divided by elaborate physical barricades.

But as Target said at the start, this is not a political book. The author views the conflict more in terms of people and morality than in terms of economics and government.

The hatred and the warfare, he says, are not basically the result of outdated laws, unfair hiring practices, or police brutality. He sees the underlying cause of Ulster's woes as the consequence of an abdication of moral responsibility by the churches — Protestant and Catholic.

Northern Ireland teetered on the crumbling edge of Civil War, but the parish magazines were facing the future with editorials and hearts held high, secure in the times of choir practice, content to know that it was "hoped to have the Templemore Avenue Brass Band — which has won many brass band competitions — accompany Evening Service," and there is "an easy method of separating a yolk from a white for the preparation of a *really* fluffy spongecake" (p. 121).

Now apart from the lies, the evasions, the "covering of truth with words," and hardly bothering at all about who "started" it, the greatest wickedness, the depth of evil, the wound in the side of Christ, piercing His heart, is that Roman Catholics and Protestants alike were all prepared to finish it by killing each other . . . that Christians hated Christians (p. 117).

Target charges that the churches failed to teach Jesus and him crucified, and that this, more than anything else, has caused the unholy smoke rising over burned-out homes in Ulster. Such a theory gives the non-Irish reader no discomfort — unless, perhaps, he compares the unhappy dearth of sermons on the evil of hating "papists" in Ireland with the number of sermons delivered in Mississippi (or Chicago) on the evil of hating "niggers."

At any rate, Target sees the whole crisis as a humiliation to Christians everywhere. Or as a British soldier put it to him: "You can stick the bloody job. . . . Sooner be back getting shot at with the bloody wogs down in Aden. . . . At least you don't expect nothing much better from *them*" (p. 105).

With such rather convincing accusations against the churches, *Unholy Smoke* has run its short course. Despite its quasipolemic style, the book provides valuable perspective on the most recent of Christian religious wars.

## How Is Earth History Revealed?

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### CREATION — ACCIDENT OR DESIGN?

By Harold G. Coffin (with chapters by Ernest S. Booth, Harold W. Clark, Robert H. Brown, Ariel A. Roth, and Edward E. White)

Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1969

512 pp illustrations \$7.95

Occasionally a book is of sufficient importance and complexity to merit discussion by more than one reviewer. The editors think that this is such a book.

A recent excellent review of Coffin's book in this journal presented an analysis of its contributions through the eyes of a biologist. I wish to give an appraisal from the viewpoint of one in earth history, particularly paleobotany.

Coffin's reliance on and generous use of the published works of Ellen G. White and the Bible as sources of truth allow him to deal frankly with issues in a way that is of particular value to Seventh-day Adventists. His attempt to base his theories on a short chronology in the tradition of most Adventist apologists becomes increasingly difficult in view of new data in fields the author represents. But there is no denying the absolutely fundamental position the short chronology holds in much Adventist thought; hence this topic is of extreme importance among Adventists, and increasingly so. It is this aspect of the volume on which I wish to focus attention.

Fundamental to the defense of a short chronology for the earth is the concept of a perfect world brought into existence in a week's time. The first section of the book is devoted to this topic and the underlying issue — how the Genesis story is to be regarded. "By faith we accept this story as a true and literal record that God has given us" leaves no doubt as to where the author stands. In the author's view, Moses, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was protected from any of the scientific misconceptions of his time, so that in addition to setting forth basic theological truths of Creation, the account was intended as a concise and literal scientific statement. This reflects a particular view of inspiration and revelation common in the Adventist church and prevalent throughout the volume. It is admitted that at times use was made of the terminology and cosmological concepts of the time. But it is implied that Moses and the other Bible writers did not concur in these popular misconceptions. This position, however, may be as precarious as the Roman Catholic position on papal infallibility.