

## Unit 2: Section C | A1 Sample answer

### **Name a contemporary conflict where religious beliefs play a role and explain the nature of the relationship between religion and the conflict**

Tribes and religious groups have a history of intolerance and prejudice to other groups. This intolerance often leads to conflicts that are justified in the name of religion and God. Often the religious group believes God has willed for them to carry out such conflicts. I will be discussing the ongoing Protestant/Catholic conflict in Ireland.

Since the Ulster Plantations under King James the First in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, many Catholic Irishmen did not support the presence of rich Protestant men in Northern Ireland. Throughout the years there were many rebellions including the Wolfe Tonne Rebellion. These rebellions climaxed with the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin. The rising led to The Government of Ireland Act 1920 that partitioned Ireland for the first time.

Ireland was divided into the Nationalist Catholic dominated South and Unionist Protestant dominated Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland consisted of 6 counties – Armagh, Tyrone, Down, Derry, Antrim and Fermanagh. The remaining 26 went to the South. The North were mainly unionist and wanted to remain a part of the UK, the South were mainly Catholic and wanted a fully united independent state.

Over the successive decades Catholics in the South achieved independence while Catholics in Northern Ireland were discriminated against over housing, jobs and health. There was also a lack of industrialisation West of the Bann while the Protestant areas were getting transport systems, Ireland's second university, Coleraine and attracting foreign investors. The government was also largely anti-Catholic with PM Basil Brooke once claimed 'Catholics are out to destroy Ulster'. These factors fuelled bitter sectarian resentment.

The Troubles then broke out. A thirty year conflict between mainly Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists in the North. More than 3,600 people died and 50,000 injured. The conflict began with a Civils Rights march on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1968, the Battle of the Bogside on August 12<sup>th</sup> 1969 and the deployment on British troops also in 1969.

The goal of the Civil Rights movement was to earn equality in the new state, as many Nationalists began to accept partition. They tried to achieve there aims politically since the IRA's failed border campaign. Terrence O'Neill introduced some moderate reforms such as a housing points system, they were too fast for Ian Paisley and other extreme loyalists and too slow for even moderates like John Hume.

In 1972 the IRA was once again revived when the Parachute Regiment killed 13 people on Bloody Sunday. The Ulster Volunteer Force used force to resist republican paramilitaries and to oppose unification. The 1973 Sunningdale Agreement that introduced the idea of power-sharing failed because of Ian Paisley and a Ulster Workers Council strike.

The IRA announced a ceasefire in 1994 and cross-party talks began in the Good Friday Agreements 1996. The Ulster Unionist Party and SDLP agreed to accept power-sharing. Irish unification can only be achieved if a majority agree in a referendum held on both sides of the border.

**It is impossible to say that most Unionists weren't Protestant and most Catholics weren't Nationalists. However the conflict has its root over land and not religion.** At its heart the Protestants felt British and Catholics felt Irish. Religion enforced the 'Us Versus Them' mentality. The perception of religious difference is what kept and still keeps the two communities in conflict with one another.

However not all Catholics were Nationalists and not all Unionists were Protestant. William Butler Yeats, the famous Irish poet was a Nationalist Protestant. Protestant Erskine Childers played an important role in the 1916 Rising and Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 There have also been Catholic Unionists. Therefore this further proves that although there deep sectarian

divisions, **the wars were did not come about because of religious ideology, but patriotism and nationalism.**

Overall, Catholicism and Protestantism played a role in the conflict in terms of identity. But the root of the conflict is over land and not religion. In the resolution of the conflict, religion played no role, only the question of unity and political ideologies did.