

BIAFRA... the children's war

(This analysis of the Nigeria/Biafra situation is by an Irish-born missionary priest who helped initiate the night relief flights to Biafra.)

By FATHER DERMOT DORAN
(NC News Service)

To understand something of the terrible tragedy that is now taking place in West Africa, it is essential to take a brief look at the historical background.

Nigeria, as we know it today, came into existence in a most arbitrary way. Lines were drawn on the map of Africa and large portions of that continent were generously divided between rival European powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884.

There were no Africans at that conference.

Britain's share included the area between the parallels of 4 degrees and 14 degrees north of the equator bordering the Gulf of Guinea. The first British governor was Sir Frederick Lugard. In 1898 he christened his territory Nigeria at the suggestion of Miss Flora Shaw, a young journalist from the London Times, whom he later married.

The name probably came from the river Niger which meanders through the territory. This it would appear was about the only thing the 65 million African inhabitants of the 356,000-square-mile area had in common with each other, apart from being black and exploited.

When, in 1914, Lord Lugard decided to amalgamate the northern part of the colony with the southern part in order "to rule more efficiently," he began to realize something of the difference that existed between the occupants of his protectorate.

The traditional rulers of the north were reluctant to be amalgamated with their southern neighbors, even if it was only "for the convenience of British administration."

They claimed that they were different socially, linguistically, culturally, and religiously from the people of the south. Their ancestors,

they claimed, came from the East — from Egypt and Arabia. They had the only language of western Africa that had already been reduced to writing by Africans themselves, modified Arabic characters being used.

They had their own form of government based on the doctrine of Islam with a well-organized judiciary administering Mohammedan law. Each of their many states was ruled over by the traditional ruler known as the emir, who was a spiritual as well as political leader. He ruled in true medieval feudal fashion.

These people felt no affinity whatsoever with "the infidels to the south," as they called them. For that matter, neither did the southerners feel or share any affinity with those "backward feudalists of the north."

Finally, however, having very little option in the matter, the northerners, almost 29 million in number, predominantly Moslem, speaking Hausa as their language, reluctantly agreed to be amalgamated — but not before they managed to get certain conditions favoring themselves. One of those was the stipulation that there would be a continuation of the emir's rule.

Another stipulation was the one that had serious repercussions later on. This prohibited Christian missionaries from proselytizing in the north even among the non-Moslem or animist peoples. Again the British readily agreed.

It is quite possible that there and then they unknowingly and unwittingly collaborated in sowing the seed that is tragically being reaped today. Be that as it may, while Christian missionaries were not only welcomed but avidly sought after by the southerners, who saw in their schools a means of bettering themselves and obtaining education — or "book" as it was commonly called then — the north closed its doors to them.

The result was that while northern children sat and learned the Koran, their counterparts in the south went to school, learned to read and write the language of their British masters

and soon were occupying junior positions in the government as well as in the commercial firms that were then flourishing along the coast.

Of these newly progressive southerners the most ambitious, without doubt, were the Yorubas of the western part of the country and the Ibos to the east. These two peoples alone had a population of 22 million. The Ibos, with a population of 12 million, were the most progressive, aggressive and hard working.

The total population of this new amalgamation outnumbered the combined population of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

The Fulanis, Tivs, Yorubas, Ibos, Efficks, to name but a few of the 250 different ethnic groups of West Africa, were living on their farms, fishing in their rivers, hunting in their forests, trading in their towns when, by royal decree, London decided they were Nigerians.

That was the type of situation that prevailed until the 1940s. Then there was a growth of national consciousness in the south, due mainly to the thousands of young, educated southerners who had gone overseas to complete their studies, seen life and politics in Britain and the United States, and returned home to fan the flames of nationalism and anti-colonialism.

By 1949, the Richards Constitution provided for separate regional development: North, West and East, thus catering to the three major ethnic groups, Hausa Fulani in the North, Yoruba in the West and Ibo in the East.

In 1953, East and West were looking for self-government from Britain; the North refused to join them.

In 1956, agitation for secession grew in the North, where the leaders were unwilling to join a Nigeria that they could not dominate. In the interest of African nationalism, the leaders of the south, such as Aliko, the Ibo of the East, (Biafra) and Chief Awolowo, the Yoruba of the West, agreed to compromise and allowed a 50 percent representation of

the north in the new independent Nigerian government.

It was under this federal system that Nigeria received its independence on Oct. 1, 1960. It was federal in name, but more a confederation in operation.

Later a fifth geographical section was carved out — the midwest. And then, when still later it was planned to subdivide the country 12 ways, the Ibos objected. They felt that the division was intended to deprive them of control of valuable oil assets in their area. This was one of the reasons for their secession and formation of Biafra. The other sections are still allied in the federal Nigerian government.

Outwardly, there appeared some semblance of unity. Many outsiders as well as some — but very few — natives believed the words of the national anthem (composed by an English woman) that "Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood, we stand." In reality, about the only brotherhood that existed was contained in the words of the song.

How was it then that Western diplomats, especially the U.S. representative, could have so gravely misinterpreted the potential of Nigeria and held it up to the world as the showcase of democracy in Africa?



"People who need people are the luckiest people in the world."

ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Of Signs and Their Meaning

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

In September, 1945, I was stationed with the Air Force in the small village of Vitry in France. The war had ended. The group I served was transient, ready for deployment to the States. It was a deadening time when the men had too little to do, and the lethargy from inactivity plus the irritation from slow departure made for a negative morale.

Each day I celebrated Mass for a handful of men, and on Sunday for that larger faithful core of solid Catholics a priest finds everywhere in the military service. On Sunday afternoons I would go out looking for small detachments who had no chaplain at all. As a priest, I considered my work included the shepherding of those who needed a little extra push to be faithful to Sunday Mass. These were entrusted to my care by my priesthood, even if not by military assignment.

One nice Sunday afternoon, in my scouting for souls, I ran across a soldier about 22 years old. He was just sitting idly alone. He seemed a typical Italian American: clear olive skin, sharp handsome features, intelligent eyes, lean strong muscles. His shirt was open, and dangling from

his neck was a medal on a strong silver chain.

We chatted a bit. He didn't react with the cordiality that the soldiers usually manifested. I chatted this up to the tedium of post-war inactivity. Finally, I got to the point:

"Did you get into Mass at the village Church this morning?"

"No, sir." The suggestion of iron in his voice stirred my soul to a troubled indignation. With the passion of the prophet Jeremiah, I said: "That's a hell of a note! (In the military we accommodated our speech to the ear and the mind of the men.) Here you are wearing a medal of Our Blessed Mother — and not going to Mass on the Lord's Day!"

The soldier lifted the chain, and in amused silence he displayed his "medal of Our Blessed Mother." It was a handsome silver Star of David.

Anyway, we parted friends — and I suppose that he has entertained his Jewish friends many times by the encounter. And I have chuckled many times at my misfired zeal.

It is the nature of man to want to belong to groups, and to let the

world know what group he is proud to have claim him. Masons and K. of C. have their insignia. High school students have their rings. Phi Beta Kappas and sundry fraternities their pins. Catholics the world over have worn religious medals both as a devotion and as a sign of their faith.

In the present personalist passion, some of the signs and symbols in the Church are being destroyed. Some priests wish to doff their clericals. Women whom we once recognized as Sisters by their garb are sinking into a religious anonymity by their indistinguishableness.

Unfortunately, with the setting aside of the sign, there is too often a setting aside of the spirit derived from belonging to their special group. They are being swallowed up subtly into the mass of secularity. In their uneasy desire "to be accepted" and to be "relevant" the words of Our Lord sound foreign: "I have given them Thy word, and the world hath hated them because they are not of the world; as I also am not of the world."

It is significant that my GI friend wanted to be identified by his silver Star of David. And he was clearly so Praise him!



COMMENTARY

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ALL IN THE FAMILY

How to Make Things Happen

By Sarah Child

My unexpected company dropped in just as I'd expected them to shortly after lunch on Sunday.

"I knew it, I knew it!" I moaned when my husband came into the kitchen to tell me the car was pulling up in the drive way.

"You knew it? What are you talking about?" he asked and without waiting for an answer went back to the game on television.

"The dining room table," I yelled. "Look at it."

Getting no answer, I went and looked at it myself. It was worse than I remembered and — in full view of the front door.

Two days before in a burst of energy I had unloaded dresser drawers of every garment in need of mending, altering or otherwise in need of attention.

Since our dining room has to do double duty, I set up the sewing machine there and had managed to get half way through the pile.

We were having a quiet weekend. When Sunday rolled around I saw no good reason to dismantle my scene of operations.

Instead, for good measure, I had added a little something extra. I had

taped up on the wall three large remnants of material — one stripe, one solid and one wildly floral. My reasoning: if I was going to sit there captive anyway perhaps I could be decking what type of wallpaper would best suit the dining room.

My scheme went perfectly. Oh, not as I had planned it — but as an invitation to drop-in guests it worked like a charm.

I should know. In that category I am a magician without parallel.

For example, besides conjuring up guests at the drop of a loaded down table I can make the telephone ring simply by:

a. Plunging my hands in bread dough.

b. Turning on TV to watch a movie I've waited years to see.

c. Or locking the back door on my way out to the store.

I can make the ladies from our parish, who stop by to see if I'm saying my rosary regularly, appear at our front door just by parading around half the morning in my housecoat.

I can make the paperboy arrive the night before he usually comes to

collect by spending the money put aside for him on Girl Scout cookies earlier in the day.

I can make my husband materialize at the back door (he will persist in bringing everybody through the kitchen) with friends I haven't seen since my working days simply by donning paint smeared slacks and putting my hair up in pink and purple curlers.

The meter reader can be summoned by sloshing wax remover across the kitchen floor and the parade of political candidates will begin as soon as the drapes are drawn for the night.

I've a way with inanimate things, too.

Need a little rain? I'll hang the kids' sneakers out to dry.

Want to see the neighbor's brush pile start to burn and smoke in the adjoining yard? I'll string up some pillowcases to bleach in the sun.

As powerful as I am in these matters, however, the above feats are merely child's play compared to my greatest act of prestidigitation.

How to assure my husband's being invited out to lunch to dine on roast chicken, green peas and tossed salad with roquefort dressing? Absolutely nothing to it. Plan it for his supper and it's a sure thing.



EUROPEAN SCENE

Ireland... Not Sleepy Time Down South

By ROBERT HOLTON

Courier-Journal
Special Correspondent

Dublin, Ireland — Coming from Northern Ireland to this capital city of the south is like moving from a battle-scarred war zone into the center of a prospering neutral country.

Almost everything about the two areas is different.

In the heavily populated sections of the north — particularly Belfast and Londonderry — the ugly scars of riots are everywhere.

Even worse, however, is the dry rot of half a century of unrest which has degraded row after row of homes and shops to paint-bare, sagging hovels.

Here in Dublin there are some slum areas — one they call the "cage" — but even there is no match for the squalor that can be found almost everywhere in the north.

And there is unemployment here, too. However, it is far from the degrading level of wholesale joblessness found across the border.

In Dublin there are countless miles of Georgian-style row homes, each in perfect repair; the brass knockers and letter slots on their front doors glistening and the window panes so clean you hardly know they are there.

In Belfast and Londonderry there is little brass in evidence; the economy being such that residents cannot afford even such small luxuries. And

the windows that have been spared the rioters' rocks are for the most part smeared and dirty.

Buses and cabs in the north are of ancient vintage. In Dublin passengers ride in shiny new cabs and large, modern, double-deckers.

There are some well-kept, unblemished residential areas in the north where the Protestant government, civic, industrial and political leaders reside. But they are few.

In the Irish Republic, rambling, well-cared-for estates in the suburbs are a common sight.

Restaurants and hotels in the north are at best second rate. In Dublin there are at least five deluxe hotels and dozens of top-flight eating houses packed with atmosphere.

The shops in Dublin and other large cities in the south are well-stocked and richly appointed. In the north the shops are shabby in most cases and often have only a pitifully thin variety of goods to offer.

But saddest of all is the comparison between the attitude of the people in the north and their counterparts in the south.

Fifty years of smoldering hatred and intermittent rioting have taken a heavy toll of Catholics and Protestants alike in the north.

The adults there seem sad, weary, pre-occupied, angry and dejected all at the same time. The children even seem a little tense — less care-free than those in the south.

In Dublin there is much laughter, a great interest in the theatre, sports events and other forms of entertainment. Poetry reading sessions in pubs are commonplace here.

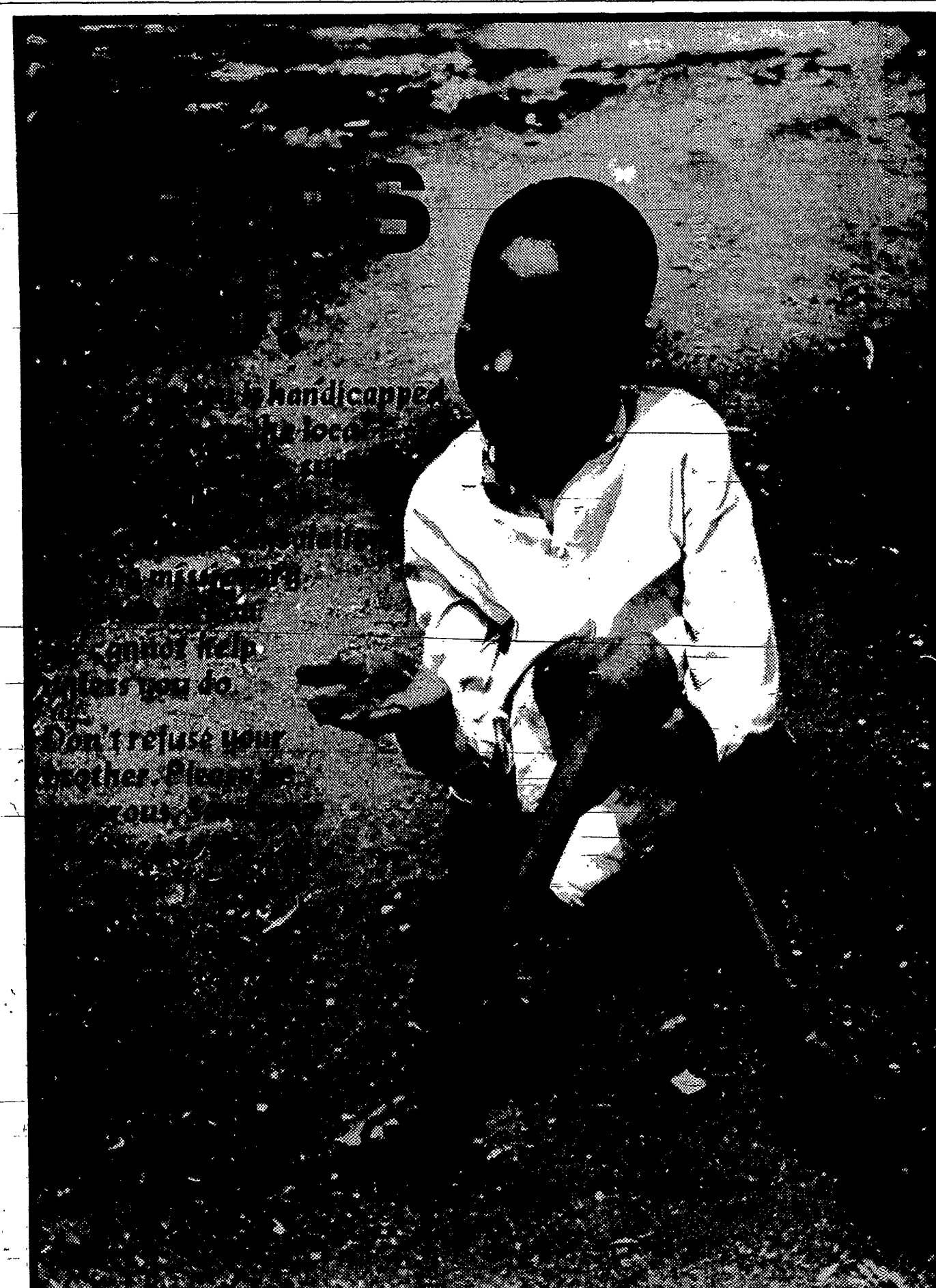
In Belfast and Londonderry there is little laughter and only scant interest in the theatre, sports events and other entertainment forms. The people of the north have other things on their minds.

Almost every Irishman in the Republic is vitally interested in what is going on across the border, but he does not want to be pictured as meddling in the situation.

"We are moving ahead fine down here," said a hotel manager. "The only thing we can do is keep out of that mess in the north. I pity the poor Catholics up there, but if we let our pity get the best of us we will end up with an all-out civil war on our hands."

However, there are many people — particularly the dedicated college and university students — who openly back the Catholics in their struggle for civil rights in the north.

"I won't subscribe to this thinking that we must keep out of the civil rights battle in the north," said one 20-year-old student. "We have an obligation to help those poor people up there and if it means arming ourselves and going into battle with the Protestant forces in the north then we must do it. Anything less than that is a sell-out of our brothers."



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