

Pope condemns Irish car bombing

By Christena Coclough
Catholic News Service

BELFAST, Northern Ireland — Irish church leaders and Pope John Paul II condemned the bloodiest terrorist bombing in Northern Ireland's history, urging people to reject violence and continue to seek peace.

Priests who visited the scene of the Aug. 15 bombing, which hit a busy shopping district in Omagh, 50 miles west of Belfast, spoke of confusion, numbness and grief. At least 28 people were killed and more than 200 people were injured by the 900-pound car bomb, which came on the 29th anniversary of the first deployment of British troops to Northern Ireland.

Archbishop Sean Brady of Armagh, visibly shaken from the atrocity, said churchgoers must unite in prayer and not lose hope that the peace process will triumph.

"Words are not very useful. We must support people by (our) presence and assure these people that these evil ones who carried out this will not succeed," Archbishop Brady said.

"People had begun to dare to hope that scenes like this had disappeared. It will open up old wounds. We can only hope that people will turn away from violence," he said.

Police said the car bomb was believed to be the work of Irish Republican Army dissidents who oppose the peace process.

At the papal summer home in Castel Gandolfo Aug. 16, Pope John Paul said, "Once again, blind violence is attempting to impede the difficult path of peace and productive harmony which most discerning people are convinced is possible."

"My earnest hope for that beloved country is that Irish people of good will not succumb to violence and that they will persevere with determination in building that peaceful coexistence on which the whole future depends," he said.

The pope prayed for those killed "in such a tragic and senseless way," and asked blessings on the injured, the families in mourning and "all who continue to put their trust in dialogue and agreement."

In the late afternoon Aug. 16, Archbishop Brady, primate of all Ireland, traveled to Beragh, near Omagh, to visit a family that lost several family members in the bombing.

Mary Grimes, 65, was shopping in Omagh at the time of the blast with her 30-year-old daughter Avirl Monahan, who



Reuters/CNS

Police stand in a rubble after a car bomb ripped through the market town of Omagh in Northern Ireland Aug. 15. At least 28 people died in the attack.

was pregnant with twins, and Avirl's 18-month-old daughter, Maura. All of them were killed.

Archbishop Brady said: "The family are just totally devastated. They are just so shocked."

Monahan is survived by her husband, Michael, two daughters and a son. Her eldest child is 6.

The bomb victims were herded into the path of the bomb after an inaccurate warning was given. Acting on a telephone tip, police evacuated the shoppers to the end of the street, where the bomb eventually exploded.

Police, ambulance crews and firefighters worked for hours to move those injured by the blast to local hospitals. Forensic experts scoured the rubble and debris to find missing limbs.

One eyewitness said: "I picked up a little boy. His legs had been blown off, but he did not even realize."

Father Kevin Mullan of Christ the King Church in Omagh was among the local religious leaders who comforted victims' families as they awaited news at a tempo-

rary hospital set up in the town's community center.

"There is a terrible sense of grief waiting to explode. God be with them," he said. "I am just going to cry with them. It will take another day to find words."

Father Eddie Deney, who works in South Africa but was on his way home for a vacation, was traveling through Omagh when the blast occurred.

He went to check on victims and saw people running around, calling out names in search of each other.

He and other priests administered last rites to the victims, but he said it was nearly impossible to tell the dead from the injured because there was so much blood.

"I felt completely numb," Father Deney said. "The only way to cope with what I saw was to switch off my emotions."

The Church of Ireland primate, Archbishop Robin Eames, comforted the injured at Dungannon hospital.

"We have had year after year of this," he said. "This is mass murder. We need to be shown that this peace process is something that can survive."

Cleric urges restraint at death camp

WARSAW, Poland (CNS) — The bishop whose diocese includes the former Auschwitz concentration camp, speaking about extremists' placement of crosses near the site, said patriotic feelings must not be turned into "blind stupidity."

Meanwhile, Polish government officials said they were working to take legal control of the site near Auschwitz where more than 100 crosses have been erected by Polish extremists since late July.

Bishop Tadeusz Rakoczy of Bielsko-Zywiec, preaching at an Aug. 14 Mass at Auschwitz to commemorate the 57th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Maximilian Kolbe, said, "Religious and patriotic feelings cannot be turned into neurosis or blind stupidity, which hinders or prevents dialogue."

Bishop Rakoczy urged an end to "all activities that have nothing in common with the cross but are carried out in its shadow."

Queen Elizabeth II joined political and religious leaders in condemning the attack. British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who traveled to Northern Ireland to meet with politicians the day after the bombing, called it "an appalling act of savagery and evil by people determined to wreck the peace process."

In Washington, the lobby group Irish National Caucus issued an Aug. 17 statement from its president, Father Sean McManus, who was visiting Northern Ireland.

"Irish-Americans totally condemn this monstrous act of savagery," he said, calling the bombing "a brutally violent and viciously evil act. No words are adequate to condemn it."

Although none of the dissident republican terrorist groups admitted planting the device, suspicion immediately fell on the Real-IRA, a splinter group which broke from the IRA and rejected Northern Ireland's Good Friday peace agreement. Its leader is believed to be a former IRA arms chief who has detailed knowledge of the organization's secret arms supplies.

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