

Thursday is UN World AIDS Day. Here is one reason why that should be of concern to us all

The killer with no regard for innocence

by GREG MURPHY who lived this story

IN early September, my father died.

With some justification, my mother, sister and myself, believe he was killed by the incompetence of the British government.

He was a severe haemophilic - a condition in males which delays the clotting of the blood for significant periods - and he was infected by hideously contaminated blood products passed by the Department of Health as being fit for use in trying to control the condition.

Last week, *The Independent* broke the story that 12 British men had died from the debilitating liver disease, Hepatitis C, brought on by the infected blood products, my father was one of them.

Correctly the newspaper gave the mechanics of the situation and also clearly indicated that the haemophilic families are furious with the Department of Health. But behind all, these desperate medical reports is a family - left husbandless, fatherless and grandfatherless.

The Church also has suffered. Dad had always been a figures man. All his life he tried to marry his devotion for the Church. In 1988, when 54, the Archbishop of Liverpool's Finance Department gave him that chance.

Labour of love
For three years he encountered a labour of love. Rather than 'the stretch of the rat-race' he said, 'I now go into work and there's a crucifix and a picture of the Pope on the wall'.

But by 1991 Dad had become so undermined by his haemophilia that he left the Curial Offices one Friday in early December to enter hospital for an operation - a hefty undertaking for a haemophilic - and he never returned.

By late January his operation hadn't worked. The medics wondered why. They tested. Then they discovered that he had developed chronic cirrhosis of the liver, caused by the Hepatitis C - which is of the same viral strain as Cholera and Yellow Fever - and we were told that we'd lose him.

Now we've lost him. At only 59.

Dad's case is littered with irony. Haemophilia is a genetic disorder that affects male children. Dad was one of three haemophilic brothers. The other two are well dead.

They didn't contract liver disease from the blood products. No, they got AIDS instead.

In the early 1980s AIDS and HIV arrived in the news reports - a dreaded connection was deduced that infected patients had prob-

bly donated blood. They had like lambs to the slaughter haemophilic like Dad had unwittingly been injecting themselves with it so as to stem the intense agonies of their blood disorder - if a jolt, in Dad it was his elbow and his knee, doesn't stop bleeding internally it callously erodes the bone.

Waited five years
For five years we waited to hear whether the death sentence had been passed on us. I cried myself to sleep at nights wondering which of the hundreds of hospital visits, at 1am in the morning, when I had gone along with Dad to keep him company, had administered the fatal injection.

That was how it was. In sheer pain, unable to sleep, Dad would simply ring the hospital, like he was told to, ask them to get an injection ready and he'd

be there in 20 minutes for a cure-all. Some cure-all.

But Dad was lucky. In 1986 we discovered that Dad had contracted HIV - heaven had been so bombarded with prayers that this miraculous escape curiously made sense to us. But as I said, his other two poor suffering brothers, with wives, children and grandchildren too, weren't so lucky.

The mental anguish was sheer hell. Worse was that you couldn't tell anyone because of the stigma. We heard reports that neighbours in a street in Newcastle found out that the man at No 22 was haemophilic - so they turned and ostracised him from lawn with 'AIDS lives here'.

I was watching TV in work one day, whilst a civil servant, and the newscaster was telling of how hundreds of haemophilic families were demanding the government accepted responsibility for the deaths of their loved ones.

Unbelievably the girl sitting next to me said: 'I hope they don't get a cent. They get all they deserve. They choose their lifestyle. If they want to be perverses then they must accept the consequences. If you ask me it's God's vengeance against the gays'.

Obviously because haemophilia began with H - in her mind it was another form of homosexuality. I'll know the girl quite well and shared a Christmas drink with her last year. She's blissfully unaware of her tactlessness.

So for three years we thought Dad had been given a new chance of life, he wasn't going to die. Mum and Dad finally got to go to the Vatican. Dad witnessed two more grandsons being baptised.

But, as the Cardinal's source suggested, it doesn't make it any less an achievement, and indeed when considering the rudiments of the book - this is a senior Churchman giving commentary on the future of a whole continent - it deserves to be noted on the nation's book stands.

Remaking Europe may indeed be its header but the book's subtitle, *The Gospel in a Divided Continent*, serves more informative purpose about what lies within from Cardinal Hume's pen.

The first thing to acknowledge is that the Cardinal is eminently qualified to comment, and although the book's format serves notice that its framework is derived from scores of homilies given during his 16-year presidency of the European Bishops' Conferences, it should be not be forgotten that this Ampleforth Benedictine has seen many key European loca-

*** AN appeal has been made for four religious sisters who can help AIDS sufferers and their families.**

The Mercy House Foundation is a charitable organisation based in North Wales, founded in 1987, and offering essential respite care for people affected by HIV/AIDS and their families. The Foundation is currently trying to raise the money necessary to purchase, refurbish and staff a new Family Respite Centre which will be the only support available to sufferers in Wales.

Shawn Bradley, founder and director of the Foundation, said: 'I would like to appeal to any Religious Sisters who may be interested in giving up 12 months of their own skill to help to develop a Catholic Christian response by being a valued member of our volunteer commitment to HIV/AIDS. The sisters will live at the centre and share in all the personal, administrative, domestic and catering work. Full training will be provided.'

Curiously for a book less than 6 weeks old, it is already out-of-date give or take a few - albeit rather important - T crosses and dots in Ulster. But the anachronism only serves greater purpose. Writes the Cardinal about Northern Ireland: 'So far no peace proposal has even been put forward. Yet recently a number of developments, including a groundswell of popular feeling in both communities and some apparent shifts within republican terrorist groups, have led many competent and knowledgeable people to speak of the first opportunity for peace in the province in 25 years.'

The tragic history of Northern Ireland illustrates all too well the dangers of false absolutes, of an exclusive solidarity, and, sadly, of the ambiguous role which religion can play in generating fear rather than love.

Many similar situations approach. Bosnia, the fall of the Communist bloc, general xenophobia - follow and it's easy to brandish the Cardinal as being long on rhetoric, but that would be a major injustice.

Indeed though the Cardinal offers many a broad view, he admits that in many instances there is still a long way to go.

that he'd had that for two had it he? No, he hadn't. So instead it was: 'How's your Dad?' 'On the same as last week.' Why disabuse them with the truth? Dad isn't - sorry wasn't - the only haemophilic in this blood-drenched boat. But he was the only husband my Mum had. So now the government refuses to accept responsibility. Last week the Department of Health said that families of those haemophilics with HIV were 'compensated' and there would be no repeat for the families of Hepatitis C haemophilics. In other words to die of AIDS was bad but to die like my Dad wasn't as bad. To give you some clue as to how bad it was, Dad was a severe haemophilic, more than enough for anyone to contend with, then he got cirrhosis (we couldn't tell anyone that either because people would assume alcohol abuse) which is a foul condition - believe me, and then in his final month he got cancer. Fighting for life on three fronts is a tall order. In the end I pleaded with St Gregory to take him and spare him.

His pain finished on September 3 - the Father and Doctor of the Church's feast day.

However, for the perpetrators of the obscene injustices carried out by a few - it may prove initially a little bit difficult to live with peace.

Living with peace shall challenge the thinking of those, who down through the years, used and supported religious differences so as to further their own political aims.

This partnership with peace will call for noble behaviour and to recognise that political ideologies are powerless to delay the suspicions that breed on sectarian hatred.

Seeking Christian solutions to inherited social/religious problems, which is the Divine way, calls for a powerful, Christian response.

The time for this is now if we are to move forward together in this wonderful moment of hope, now is the time for all of us to weed out the sectarian terminology - 'Tag' 'Prod' - from our vocabulary and sow the seeds of Christ's teaching with words like Brother, Sister, Friend.

Those people who lived in peace will truly appreciate the social freedom to work and shop in the cities and towns, without the threat of death and will consider this an answer to their prayers for an end to strife.

I feel the real heroes in Northern Ireland are the relatives of the victims who, when asked about their feelings on the death of a loved one, pleaded in their anguish for no retaliation.

It was their words, re-echoing the words of an innocent Man on a cross - 'Forgive them Father for they know not what they do' which perhaps may have helped to change the entrenched political views of their representatives.

It was in this power to forgive that I recognised the glory of the resurrected Lord.

True peace, the peace in the individual heart, has been the most powerful of all forces in securing an end to hostilities in this land, a land once traumatised by barbarism is now serene with hope.

The editor welcomes contributions for this column. No more than 450 words, please, on topics of current news value.

Address to: V. E. W. P. O. I. N. T. Catholic TIMES, St James's Buildings, Oxford Street, Manchester M1 6PP.



Pray for the repose of the soul of

WILLIAM AUGUSTINE MURPHY

Born **GRO-C** 1934
Died 3 September 1994

VIEWPOINT

Living with peace

ANN DIAMOND of GRO-A Co Derry examines the sudden reality of peace after 25 years of fear.

PEACE is a word which is misused in Irish society today and also throughout the world.

Peace is not brought about by the absence of conflict or the presence of justice, these are only social conditions which help one to live safely and comfortably.

To say that the majority of people in Northern Ireland have lived without peace for twenty-five years would be an insult to their Christianity.

Most of my fellow countrymen and women lived in peace during 'the troubles' and will continue to live in peace, now 'the troubles' have ceased.

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A cardinal expert looks at Europe



Remaking Europe
The Gospel in a Divided Continent

BASIL HUME

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