

To understand Irish history you must know something about the Irish Church.

Saint Patrick took Christianity to Ireland. When he came to Ireland he was a bishop and began to convert¹ the people. He built more than 50 churches in Ireland, the people were ready to become Christians. The faith² that Patrick gave to the Irish was the Roman Catholic faith. It is still strong today and people have always been ready to fight for it.

In the 12th century the Norman king of England began to bring Ireland under English rule. When England became a Protestant country in the 16th century, bad times began for the Irish Catholics. The greatest resistance³ to protestantism was in the north, in Ulster. Some years later English and Scottish settlers were brought to Ireland and more and more Catholics were driven out⁴. The English and Scottish settlers took the land from the Irish and for many years there was fighting between the English and the Irish. But the motives of the English were not only religious, the English wanted to keep control over Ireland to have a means of defence⁵ against attacks from Spain and France. From this time on, Irish history is the story of unsuccessful attempts to break away from British rule. There had often been rebellions against the English landowners, but every time the Irish were punished severely⁷ and even massacred.

In the middle of the 19th century the Great Potato Famine brought hunger and starvation to the poor Irish. One and a half million people died, many others emigrated, especially to the USA. The Irish blame⁸ the English for these deaths and say that they had not sent enough help. Now more and more Irish wanted Ireland to become independent, especially the newly founded radical party Sinn Fein. After the war for independence there were two Irish states, the Irish Republic with its parliament in Dublin and Northern Ireland or Ulster with its parliament in Belfast, which remained⁹ under British rule.

But this did not bring peace to the island. There are still a lot of problems in Ireland, two thirds of the people in Northern Ireland are Protestants, one third is Catholic. In the south almost everyone is Catholic. Some people in both the north and the south want Ireland to be one country. In the north the Catholics are discriminated in a lot of ways, and they are treated as second-class people. So since 1969 there has been fighting, bombing and killing in Northern Ireland. The IRA, an illegal terrorist organization, goes on fighting against the British and there are regular campaigns of terrorism, not only in Northern Ireland, but also in Britain and even in Germany.