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## Letter from Ireland, 1970

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## Letter From Ireland, 1970

Ireland has made the international headlines this year again, but not for the usual reasons. Instead of the green isle of peace, we have a land torn at one end by the riots of a politico-religious nature, and disturbed by strikes and industrial unrest at the other. The troubles between Catholics and Protestants in the North of Ireland are in a way near solution, and an uneasy peace is maintained by what is virtually an army of occupation in the trouble spots of Belfast and Derry. No one denies that the problems to be faced are great, but most people believe that the solutions would more easily be found if there was a little more Christianity among the Christians. In the South, we have again made the top of the European class for time lost by industrial strikes. As I write the banks are closed because of strikes, and the building industry has been idled for nearly three months because of a strike in the cement industry. Even junior hospital doctors are threatening to resign their posts in search of better conditions of service and pay. All these obviously have an effect of the economy, but less obvious is a considerable fall in the tourist trade, which is very important to us.

Perhaps we all fail to communicate – an explanation for most problems these days. Age fails to communicate with youth, church fails with the laity. This idea of the church has always been a strong one in Ireland. Our parents seemed to go along with this benign dictatorship, but not so the post-war generation. The Second Vatican Council stressed that we are all one body, the people of God, but this has not been very much shown in practice as yet. However last month we made a big leap forward into the seventies, with a National Centre of Communication, promoted by the hierarchy but headed by a layman. The object of this Centre is education and promotion of understanding between the clergy and laity. This new organization stems from the Catholic Truth Society, which had come to the end of the road with the changing times of the post-war world. Originally publishing pamphlets on religious and moral questions for a population which was rapidly becoming literate, it had become outmoded by more modern media of communication. To-day's youth are tomorrow's parents, so new people skilled in the use of the newer media were recruited for this purpose: we progress.

Medically, we also progress, with those sparring partners of old, the Irish Medical Association, and the Irish Medical Union, much in accord. Negotiations proceed with the Ministry concerning State-aided fee per service system of medicine. We have nearly solved the problems involved in implementing the legislation on breath analysis and blood tests for suspected driving under the influence of alcohol. The Irish level of alcohol accepted at 120 mgms. is pretty high by European standards, but it is a start. The merger of the Universities which seemed so likely two years ago now seems to have become a subject for debate, with both sides hanging on grimly to see what will happen. Even now, the city of Limerick wants a new University: this in a country of three million people, which already has five Universities and five Medical Schools. The Catholic Doctors Guild may need the same treatment as the Catholic Truth Society. Its activities are minimal at the moment, but they do not reflect the great work being done by Irish doctors individually in the Lay Apostolate, especially in marriage guidance. We wish the new Master General of the Guild, Dr. McKeogh, every success in his efforts to up-date this Society of Doctors.

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