Catholicism vs Protestantism in Ireland

Since 597 A.D., Great Britain was essentially catholic as the dominant religion. This included England, Scotland, and Ireland. However, in the early 1500s, a man by the name of Martin Luther (see image on right) began a branch of Christianity which separated from the Roman Catholic faith: protestantism. Like the name suggests, it was a protest against the catholic church and sought to correct what it deemed to be errors in the religion. Two of these perceived errors were that the pope was the head of the church and in the belief of transubstantiation - the idea that during communion bread turns into the body of Christ and wine turns into His blood.

Despite protestantism, Great Britain, under the rule of Henry VIII (see image on right), was still firmly catholic. He even persecuted protestants. However, a problem arose when Henry wanted to divorce his wife, Catharine of Aragon. Pope Clement VII refused to allow the divorce. So, Henry decided to become not only head of state, but also head of religion, and formed the Church of England. The head of the Church of England was the ruling monarch. Even though it barely differed from the catholic faith, it removed the pope as the head of church. However, it also opened the door to change, which the protestants were quick to jump on.

When Henry's son, Edward VI (see image on left), ascended to the throne, he made the official religion of Great Britain protestant.

Then his successor, Mary I (see image below), who was raised catholic, decided to revert Great Britain's national religion to catholicism.

Then when Elizabeth I (see image below)came to power, unseating Mary I, she reverted Great Britain's national religion again to being protestant.

It was Elizabeth I who decided to unite her United Kingdom under one protestant faith. The problem was that Ireland, long a devoutly catholic nation, was not entirely willing to comply. This began what was known as The Troubles, a series of violence that spanned all the way to the 20th century. The Irish nationals, seeking independence from English rule, were typically staunchly Catholic, while the unionists - typically protestant - sought a union with Britain because they were afraid of becoming an unprotected minority in Ireland.

The geopolitical (politics as they pertain to geography) and sociopolitical (politics as they pertain to sociology) complexities of Ireland became entwined with religion. Much of this conflict occurred in Northern Ireland in Ulster, which includes Belfast, and saw the bloodiest violence. In the early 1900s, while much of Ireland became independent, Northern Ireland remained a part of the United Kingdom (Britain).

These conflicts of national identity as well as religious identity would certainly be felt by the characters in *The Dead*, as seen with the discussion between Aunt Kate (catholic) and Mr. Browne (protestant).