

The Phytophthora Infestans Syndrome

No one knows for certain how many people died during the Great Irish Potato Famine, but some historians estimate that the number could be between 500,000 and 1,100,000. Another million people left Ireland, many for the United States. The famine lasted from 1845 until 1851.

In one sense, this was an unnecessary famine. The famine was produced not because Ireland suffered some catastrophic event that totally rendered their farms lands completely sterile and unable to produce any kind of crop. No, one fungus affecting only one kind of crop, the potato, was responsible for the Great Famine.

Why do I say it was an unnecessary famine? Simply because other crops could still be grown and harvested even though the potato was being attacked by *Phytophthora infestans*—a fungus that made the potato plant leaves to turn black and the root (the potato) to wither and rot. Why were there no alternate crops grown of corn and wheat and others that would sustain life till a remedy was had for the potato disease?

No one in Ireland or most of Europe, for that matter, had ever heard of potatoes before the 1600s. Potatoes which were of South American origin arrived in Europe by returning English and Spanish explorers. It was soon learned that potatoes grew prolifically in the boggy and rocky soil of Ireland. Even a small acreage of a half-acre could feed a family of six. And since the potato grew so easily and readily it soon became the main crop and also the mainstay of life. Other crops were too expensive and took much more land to farm, so they were simply not grown. By the 1840s, about 3 million people in Ireland were eating potatoes for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It became apparent that, for the common man, the potato was life itself; therefore, when the fungus, *Phytophthora infestans*, attacked the potato crops of Ireland it severed the mainstay and life support of an entire country.

The *Phytophthora infestans* syndrome, basically speaking, is—an imported system that, in time, becomes the mainstay of life—and life centers around it in great dependence—it becomes the easy, and comfortable agent of life—total dependence is the result—however, when disease sets in—there is resistance to change—no other source exists to sustain life—as the system dies so die those dependent upon it. And it was all an unnecessary famine!

The potato, even though of foreign origin, had become such an easy and comfortable crop that when the infestation began to manifest itself the farmers and the leaders of the country were resistant to change. The ground and climate of Ireland lent themselves to great potato crops but at the time of failure these men were so locked in step that they could not change—and did not change until it was too late to change. Hundreds of thousands perished, all the while when they could have changed the crop to something that would have fed the masses. It was truly an unnecessary famine!

This is what happens to most all men made organizations. Many become so comfortable with the organizational structure that they ignore the disease that is attacking the "leaves" and the roots of the structure. At first the fungus was slight and some thought that this too shall pass, and we will get on with life after it goes away. This is what happened, for instance, with the TV issue. It never went away,

and it continued to infest until it ate like a canker and some begin to say that it really wasn't really all that bad, "We can live with it." And then there were those who thought that they could turn it around by simply planting more potatoes, and all the time thousands around them were dying.

The Great Irish Potato Famine started one of the largest population shifts of the day. Many Irish families came to America which was offering them great hope and a bright future. The few that survived were those that sought a new life in another world while those that kept trying to plant the same foreign crop in the same diseased soil—died. The famine was an unnecessary famine it could have been prevented if total dependence had not rested and trusted in one single system for survival.

There is only One with Whom total dependence will never produce a famine or will become diseased—and that is the Lord Jesus Christ! Total trust and confidence in Him will never make one ashamed but anything and everything less than His work in the earth will eventually become infested with death-dealing diseases of spirit and heart. We dare not allow dependence to totally reside in any other system than that of the Kingdom of God—for that is what we must not only seek after, but we must seek it first.

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