NORTHERN IRELAND
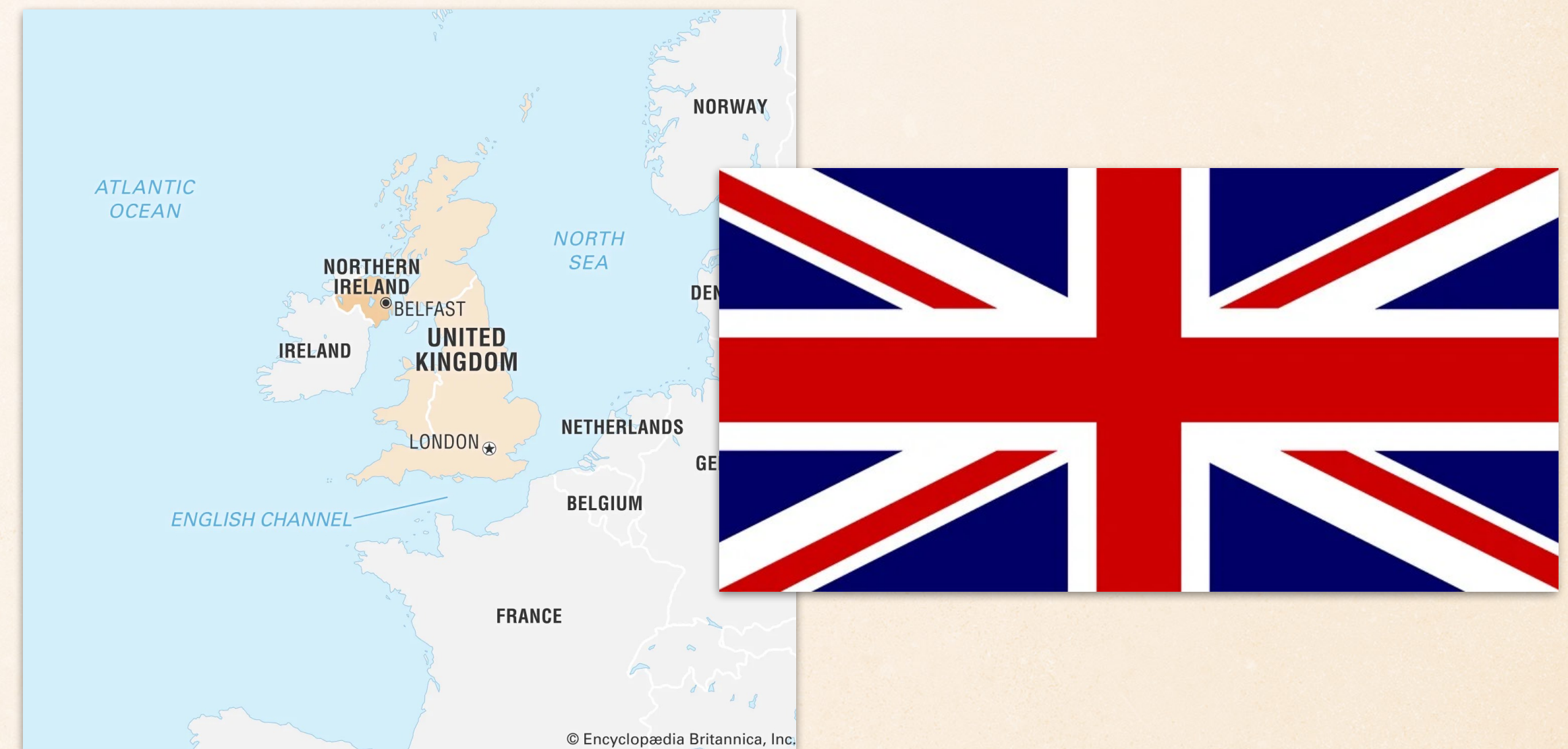
NORTHERN IRELAND

- Continent: Europe

- Population: 1,914,232

- Religion:
  - Christian 56.66%
  - Non 34.49%
  - Muslim 3.20%
  - Hindu 0.94%

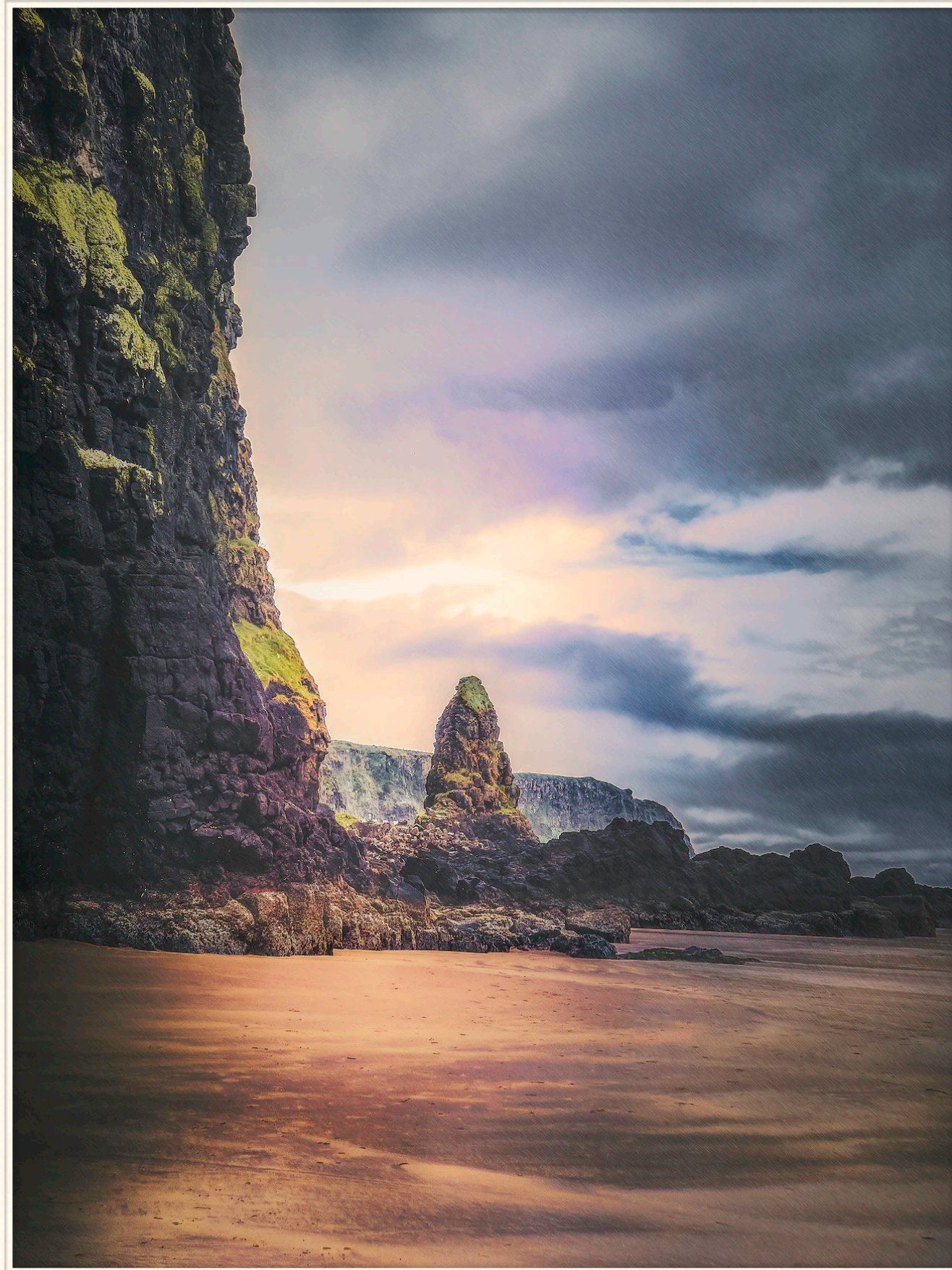- Literacy Rate: 99%

- Unreached: 29.7%

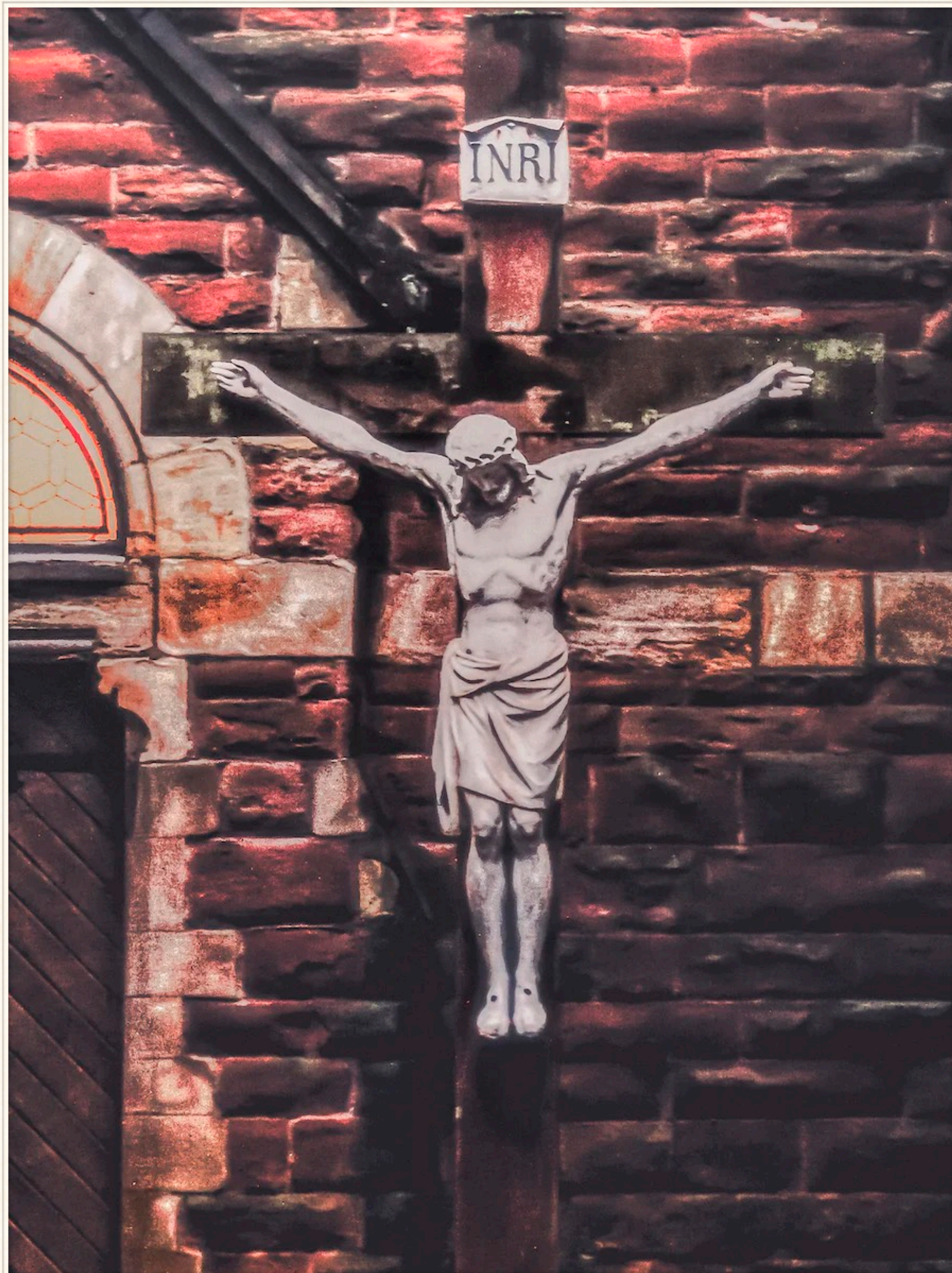
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NORTHERN IRELAND

From the unique volcanic pillars of The Giant's Causeway to the sparkling waters of Lough Neagh, Northern Ireland stands as a nation of great beauty that belies its conflicted past. After Saint Patrick first brought Christianity to Ireland in the 400's, the island enjoyed centuries of Christian heritage. As Britain gained control, though, and more and more English and Scots settled in northeastern Ireland, tensions grew between the largely Catholic Irish and largely protestant settlers. When the Republic of Ireland gained independence in 1922, the six counties of Northern Ireland remained as a province of the United Kingdom. This did not end conflict, and civil violence erupted in the 1960's. By the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and resulting cease-fire, over 3600 people had been killed in sectarian violence. Segregation continues in Northern Ireland today, with separate communities and schools dividing the land.

Once home to one of the largest shipbuilders in the world, employing over 35,000 workers, Northern Ireland's economy suffered greatly during the decades of unrest. Almost one-third of the workforce is now in the public sector, and government spending in Northern Ireland is higher per capita than any other part of the United Kingdom. After nearly two decades of peace, a Catholic middle-class is growing as a result of laws against discrimination, and Northern Ireland is transitioning to a post-industrial economy.

As in much of the West, Northern Ireland is increasingly gripped by materialism and hedonism. The number of those claiming to be non-religious continues to rise. Church attendance is in decline, although it remains higher than in Scotland, Wales, and England. In fact, the area around Belfast has one of the highest concentrations of evangelical churches in the world. The Church continues to carry a heavy burden for overseas missions, outpacing the rest of the UK in its generosity. Mistrust and resentment still hinder reconciliation and the spread of the Gospel in Northern Ireland, and there is great need for repentance and forgiveness for past transgressions and crimes. While long used as an example of religion's destructive influence, Northern Ireland, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can be a testament to the world of God's power to restore and heal, reconciling believers to one another and to Himself.

PRAYER POINTS

"If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it." John 14:14

- Pray for Christ to heal bitterness and distrust resulting from former fighting.

- Pray for reconciliation and unity between Protestant and Catholic believers that will stand as a model for other groups.

- Pray for continued commitment by the Church to send and support missionaries.