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CHAPTER 12

# RELIGION

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A WELL-WORN IRISH JOKE BEGINS WITH a stranger being stopped on the streets of Belfast and asked whether he is a Protestant or a Catholic. To hear these words in Northern Ireland, as surely everyone knows, is not a good omen. Normally the natives go to great lengths to avoid this explosive question, preferring to work out the answer by the subtle code of nods and winks that one anthropologist has called "the telling."[1] In this case, our unfortunate visitor replies, "Neither, I'm an atheist." "Aye," insists the Belfast man, "but are ye a Protestant atheist or a Catholic atheist?"

Like much of the black comedy that thrived during the Troubles, this old joke invites us to despair at the intractability of Ulster's sectarian division and its apparently irrational character, as well as the persistent connection between violence and religious intolerance. Not surprisingly, perhaps, a version of it turns up in Christopher Hitchens's *God Is Not Great* (2007), where the author recalls interviewing the relatives of those "kidnapped and killed or tortured by rival religious death squads, often for no other reason than membership of another confession."[2] It also appears in Richard Dawkins's best-selling polemic, *The God Delusion* (2006). Although Dawkins clearly understands that the Troubles revolved around political issues rather than theological controversies, he maintains that there would have been no conflict without religion. Indeed he believes that intractable violence all across the world—Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Kosovo—can be attributed to the prevalence of religious mentalities.[3]

In contrast, for historians and sociologists, religious difference is not an adequate explanation of violence, but rather something that must itself be explained. And, as it turns out, there is no evidence that individuals who are more inflexible in their religious beliefs or more regular in church attendance are also more militant in their politics.[4] But recent controversies concerning the multiple cases of child abuse concealed by the Catholic Church have provided further reasons for hostility toward organized religion, in this case south of the border. The domineering figure of John Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin between 1940 and 1971, is now viewed as the personification of everything that was wrong with independent Ireland—a society that was authoritarian, philistine, and conformist; that regarded material wealth and modernity with suspicion and encouraged a fatalistic acceptance of poverty; a society whose churches and schools seethed with sexual exploitation and petty brutality. Looking back at the decades of economic stagnation that followed Irish independence, some scholars have also suggested that Catholicism, at least in its Irish manifestations, is incompatible with capitalist enterprise. Tom Garvin recognizes that what he calls Catholic "fundamentalism" cannot, on its own, account for the fact that the Irish missed out on the unprecedented economic growth that characterized post-war Europe. Avoidance of the Second World War, with its attendant social and cultural convulsions, is surely one important factor. Others include the demographic legacy of the Great Famine of the 1840s, and the undoing of landlordism by the Land Acts of the later nineteenth century, which created an entrenched social order dominated by a large class of small farmers, whom economic reformers were afraid to confront. There is also the inconvenient fact that, during the same period, Irish-Americans remained devout Hiberno-Roman Catholics, and yet they managed to enjoy worldly success without the inhibitions attributed to their old-world cousins. Yet the villains of Garvin's influential book *Preventing the Future* are preeminently the clerics. Garvin quotes approvingly Horace Plunkett's view that Catholicism in Ireland was "in some of its tendencies non-economic, if not actually anti-economic," because it elevated the prospect of justice in the next world above human betterment.[5] The resulting portrait of independent Ireland is disturbingly reminiscent of Ulster Unionist denunciations of the priest-ridden Free State.[6]

It would appear that St. Patrick has a lot to answer for. But a survey of recent historical controversies—over the failure of the Reformation in Ireland, the impact of the penal laws, the timing and extent of the devotional revolution—makes possible a much more complex understanding of the impact of religion on political division, violence, and economic behavior. If anything, it suggests that the criticisms of Irish religion outlined above have mistaken cause for effect. Most historians, for example, have concluded that the sexual puritanism of modern Ireland is the product of a highly distinctive social structure rather than Catholic clerical power. Similarly, the intransigent character of Irish faith can plausibly be attributed to political polarization rather than the reverse. But to think of religion as simply a convenient kind of boundary marker between two ethnic or national groups, as if religious belief were interchangeable with language or skin color, is equally inadequate. How the churches have been structured and governed, their relationship with schools and the state, and their theological and social outlooks all have important implications for the internal experiences and values of the two main communities, as well as the functioning of the boundary itself.[7]

Religious hostility between Protestants and Catholics reflects a combination of theological tradition, ecclesiastical organization, and differing experiences of authority. For militant Protestants, such as "Roaring Hugh Hanna" in the 1860s or Ian Paisley in the 1960s, "popery" was not viewed simply a set of religious doctrines but as a sinister and powerful *political* organization bent on eradicating heresy. Nationalist resentment at Protestant dominance was not focused on the church—there is no single Protestant church—but on its political and social manifestations, such as the Orange Order. Such fears reflect the actual behavior of the two constitutional entities established in the 1920s. Southern Protestants were permitted to maintain their social privileges in a state that nevertheless gave legislative backing to Catholic teachings on divorce and contraception. In contrast, Northern Catholics suffered widespread political and social discrimination in a state that was—in its outward forms at least—secular. Anti-Catholic stereotypes in the North combined psychological attributes (Catholics lacked the industry and independence of the "Ulsterman"), social prejudice (Catholic poverty was attributed to lack of family planning and other forms of self-discipline), as well as political disloyalty.[8] While anti-Catholicism is an established field of historical and sociological research, there has yet to be an academic study of "anti-Protestantism." The materials for such a study are nevertheless abundant. In the Free State of the 1920s and 1930s, for example, Protestantism was often equated with paganism, materialism, sexual immorality, and birth control—then identified as "the crime of race suicide," which thankfully had not established a footing among "the plain people of Ireland, that is, among the Catholic people."[9]

The most celebrated revolt against Irish religion generated *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, first serialized in 1914; but Joyce's mind remained "supersaturated" with the beliefs he had disavowed.[10] *Ulysses* is suffused with references to religious orders, saints, Catholic rituals, devotions, and doctrines.[11] Correspondingly, the occult preoccupations of W. B. Yeats (and other literary revivalists) have been interpreted as a form of specifically Protestant mysticism, a fin-de-siècle response on the part of Anglo-Irish bohemians to the "superstitious" Catholicism they regarded with a mixture of contempt and fascination.[12] Joyce himself suspected that the craze for Theosophy was an escape route for lapsed Protestants, and retorted that the literary mystics of Dublin could not "compare either for consistence, holiness, or charity with a fifth-rate saint of the Catholic Church."[13] Even ex-Protestants and ex-Catholics have been divided by the creeds they have repudiated. As our Irish atheist joke reminds us, religion means many things. It has helped construct enduring collective identities as well as providing personal assurance and a sense of salvation.

## I

Compared with their European neighbors, or with the English-speaking societies of North America and Australasia, the single most striking feature of Irish people is surely their obstinate religiosity. In the now voluminous literature on secularization, Ireland is regularly cited as the outstanding exception to general trends. During the 1960s the reverence displayed in Ireland toward the priesthood was unmatched anywhere in the Western world. An astonishing 78% of Dublin Catholics identified with the following statement, which today seems almost incomprehensible: "if I had a son, I would surely wish him to be a priest, above and beyond everything else in the world." This figure is taken from a sociological survey carried out by an American Jesuit, Bruce Francis Biever, with the cooperation of Archbishop McQuaid. The results now seem more damaging than the rabid outpourings of Ian Paisley's *Protestant Telegraph*. In the event of a conflict between church and state, 87% of respondents rejected the proposition that their primary allegiance should be given to the state. Biever also found that 73% of his respondents did not believe that the pleasurable feelings associated with sex were good, while 69% objected to the statement that what a person does in his heart is more important than going to mass.[14]

For much of the twentieth century the Irish Catholic was a fixed point of reference in a sea of bewildering change, rivaled only by the *Polak-Katolik*.[15] The Irish and the Poles were three times more likely to be regular church-attenders than the French, Germans, or Dutch; they also provide the only two cases where the number of religious vocations actually increased after the sixties rather than plummeted.[16] How far this national exceptionalism can be projected back beyond the 1960s, into an era before large-scale surveys of belief and practice, is less clear. We tend to forget that the decade after 1945 was an era of religious revival in the United States and many parts of Europe, when Christianity was regarded as a defining feature of the free world, in contrast to Nazi Germany or global Communism. We need to remember also that Catholicism was intensely political all across post-war Europe, whether in Italy and parts of France (where politics polarized between Catholics and Communists) or in the "pillarized" society of the Netherlands (where Catholics and Protestants formed regional subcultures alongside Socialists and Liberals). In the first half of the twentieth century it is arguable that England, where religious practice had been in decline since the 1890s, was more anomalous than Ireland.[17] Yet foreign visitors to Ireland, like Louis Paul-Dubois in 1908, were generally struck by "the intensity of Catholic belief there, and by the fervour of its outward manifestations."[18] What made Ireland unusual, moreover, was not just high levels of sacramental observance but also the ideological and organizational power of the church. Its vigor and endurance can only be understood if we bear in mind that in Ireland (as, again, in Poland) fidelity to the church had become intertwined with a long-standing struggle for national liberation.

The religious topography of Ireland in the 1960s reflects surprisingly faithfully the patterns of national or ethnic settlement established by the plantation schemes of the seventeenth century (see table 12.1). During the early modern period, Irish people did not, with relatively few exceptions, become Protestant; instead Protestant people were imported into Ireland, on a scale with no obvious contemporary European parallels. The first religious census was attempted in 1732–1733, based on information supplied by the collectors of the hearth tax. There are good reasons for thinking that these tax returns understated the number of households in general and the number of Catholic families in particular. Scholars have suggested that the size of the Catholic majority, estimated at 73%, was probably closer to 80%. Yet the regional pattern is instantly recognizable. The hearth tax returns revealed that Protestants were vastly outnumbered in the three provinces of Leinster (4:1), Munster (9:1), and Connacht (11:1). In the six counties that would later compose Northern Ireland, however, Protestant families enjoyed substantial majorities in Antrim (4:1), Down (3:1), Londonderry (3:1), and Armagh (2:1); while in Fermanagh they outnumbered Catholic families by three to two, and in Tyrone they were "near Equal." In the northeast, today, Church-of-Ireland congregations are still clustered where English colonists settled, along the Lagan Valley into north Armagh and Fermanagh; while Presbyterians are most numerous in the heartland of Scots settlements in Antrim and north Down. When William Shaw Mason compiled his three-volume *Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland* (1814–1819), the first work of its kind, the imprint of seventeenth-century settlement was still evident at the level of the individual parish. Maghera in County Derry is a typical example: the survey reported "the usual division of its inhabitants into English, Irish, and Scotch," noting that the differences of dialect, customs, and creed coalesced to demarcate "distinct races of people."[19]

Since the seventeenth century the spatial distribution of the main denominations has altered in two obvious ways. One reflects the gradual erosion of Protestantism, a comparatively recent development. In the first quarter of the twentieth century the minority denominations in the South were depleted by higher rates of emigration, lower birth rates, and intermarriage; the dismantling of British rule and the violence of the Irish revolution also contributed to the decisive drop that took place between 1911 and 1926.[20] Since the 1960s the Protestant majority in the Six Counties has also contracted as a result of lower fertility and intensified communal segregation. The effects of urbanization have been even more dramatic. Plans to expel all Catholics from cities and towns were implemented under Cromwell in the 1650s but abandoned as impractical in subsequent decades. In Georgian Dublin and in Victorian Belfast rapid urban expansion meant that these two Protestant bastions came to reflect the denominational balance of their respective hinterlands. When Jonathan Swift took up residence as dean of St. Patrick's in 1715, the Catholic population of Dublin was around a third of the total, but these proportions had already been reversed by the end of the century.[21] When Wolfe Tone visited Belfast in 1791—the town he called his "adopted mother"—its eighteen thousand inhabitants were overwhelmingly Presbyterian; a century later Catholics accounted for just over a quarter of the population, having increased rapidly in the first half of the century and then fallen after the Famine (see table 12.2).[22]

TABLE 12.1. PERCENTAGE OF CATHOLICS, 1732

| *Year* | *East Ulster* | *Mid-Ulster* | *South Ulster* | *Rest of Ireland* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1732 | 23 | 51 | 61 | 86.57 | 73 |
| 1732 (adjusted) | 24.84 | 55.08 | 65.88 | 93.50 | 79 |

*Source*: David Bindon, *An Abstract of the Number of Protestant and Popish Families in the Several Counties and Provinces of Ireland* (Dublin, 1736).

*Note*: East Ulster here refers to Antrim, Down, and Belfast; Mid-Ulster to Londonderry, Armagh, Tyrone, and Fermanagh; South Ulster to Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan.

Adjustments in the boundaries between confessional communities have generally resulted from social and economic shifts rather than the accumulation of individual decisions to change sides. The most obvious exceptions derive from the eighteenth-century "penal times," when it was hoped that social pressures, reinforced by discriminatory legislation, would rectify the imbalance between the Anglican and the Catholic populations. In fact only 5,800 Catholics conformed to

TABLE 12.2. PERCENTAGE OF CATHOLICS, 1834–1991

| *Year* | *East Ulster* | *Mid-Ulster* | *South Ulster* | *Rest of Ireland* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1834 | 31.4 | 50.5 | 74.9 | 92.8 | 80.9 |
| 1861 | 29.7 | 51.6 | 76.3 | 91.1 | 77.7 |
| 1911 | 24.3 | 50.5 | 81.8 | 93.8 | 75.0 |
| 1991 | 29.3 | 54.8 | 87.6 | 91.8 | 75.1 |

*Source*: John Coakley, "Religion, National Identity and Political Change in Modern Ireland," *Irish Political Studies* 17: 1 (2002), p. 10.

*Note*: East Ulster here refers to Antrim, Down, and Belfast; Mid-Ulster to Londonderry, Armagh, Tyrone, and Fermanagh; South Ulster to Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan.

the established church, roughly a third of them from landed families. Even at their peak, in the 1760s, conformities numbered just 131 annually. In the short term, moreover, converts were treated as a distinct category or "interest," mistrusted by many members of the established church. Far from abandoning their own communities, many converts had simply opted for a pragmatic accommodation with the Protestant regime and used their influence to shield their Catholic relatives from persecution.[23]

## II

Contemporaries who reflected on the character of Ireland's Protestant Ascendancy recognized that religious affiliation, ethnic attachment, and social status had overlapped to produce an antagonistic relationship more profound and enduring than any single factor. The Williamite war (1689–1691) saw the last formal military campaigns on Irish soil and was followed by the final transfers of confiscated Catholic estates. After the battles of the Boyne and Aughrim the victorious Protestants, such as Sir Richard Cox, spoke of the Irish as "Enemies by Nation, Manners, Religion and Interest."[24] Differences of national origin and of "interest" (i.e., those created by the redistribution of landed property) were not, by themselves, viewed as insurmountable: indeed Cox looked forward to a day when they would be "*buried and annihilated.*" It was the religious bar, he believed, "*the Irreconcilable Antipathy that is between the Roman Catholick Religion and Heresie,*" that obstructed reconciliation:

> This great concern has so silenced all the rest, that at this Day we know no difference of Nation but what is expressed by *Papist* and *Protestant*; if the most Ancient Natural Irish-Man be a Protestant, no Man takes him for other than an English-Man; and if a Cockny be a Papist, he is reckoned, in *Ireland*, as much as Irish-man as if he was born on Slevelogher [Sliabh Luachra].[25]

The extension of the Reformation in Ireland, where the power of the English crown had been severely restricted, was dependent on repeated bursts of English conquest and colonization stretching over more than a century and culminating in the military campaigns fought by Cromwell and William III. The emergence—between roughly the 1550s and the 1640s—of two distinct and mutually hostile religious blocs was more the product of violence than its cause. There were certainly other reasons the Irish Reformation failed, most obviously the poor resources and inadequate organization of the existing church.[26] As in many other parts of Europe, the attempt to replace a religion of ritual observance with a bibliocentric faith based on scriptural authority and personal salvation also confronted the formidable obstacles of illiteracy and linguistic difference. For at least a century after Luther's defiance of Rome, the Reformation everywhere remained a largely urban phenomenon; and where it eventually triumphed—in England, Scotland, parts of Germany, and the Netherlands—it was often weakened by ferocious internal divisions.[27] Catholic Ireland also benefited from the system of Irish colleges scattered through Spain, France, Italy, and the diverse territories that made up the Holy Roman Empire, which produced the standard ideological defenses of the Irish nation in addition to a regular supply of priests. There is nevertheless much truth in Edmund Burke's view that religious reform was fatally compromised by its entanglement in the contest between settlers and natives that could be traced all the way back, through the reign of Elizabeth, to a period "before the words Protestant and Papist were heard of in the world."[28] Crucially, the sporadic imposition of Protestantism was bound up not only with the military conquest of Gaelic Ireland but also with the marginalization of the Old English nobility and gentry—the older colonial community descended from Anglo-Norman settlement of the twelfth century, who had been the traditional agents of anglicization in Ireland.

That religious differences were a consequence of political polarization, rather than its cause, has been borne out by those few adventurous Irish historians who have attempted comparative analyses. Where the Reformation thrived—in parts of France, in the Netherlands, in Bohemia and Hungary under the Hapsburgs, and in the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth—Protestantism had become allied with the defense of noble privileges and representative institutions against a centralizing monarchy; in Ireland the situation was the other way round. A fruitful comparative survey of Ireland, Bohemia, and Hungary carried out by Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin has identified a range of other significant factors. In each case an imperial monarchy sought to impose its official religion on a subordinate kingdom by coercion. But in central Europe the Habsburgs benefited from more compelling push-and-pull factors. Military coercion against Protestant rebels in Bohemia was systematic and sustained, whereas religious persecution in Ireland ebbed and flowed as priorities shifted in London. At the same time, Protestant Ireland lacked the resources to mount the extensive missionary enterprise introduced in Bohemian lands, where nineteen new Jesuit colleges were founded. Above all, however, Ó hAnnracháin confirms that the relationship between metropolitan authority and the local elites was the key element in determining the success or failure of conversion. In Hungary and Bohemia the imposition of new office-holders from the Habsburg court was tempered by the retention of native Magyar, Croatian, and Czech magnates; in Ireland the religious conformity of the landed class was achieved by replacing it with another.[29]

Although Ireland's conflicting communities were increasingly divided along religious lines, this is not the same thing as saying that religion *caused* the divisions.[30] To illustrate this distinction we have only to examine that paradigmatic case of "sectarian" violence, the 1641 rising, which became the key foundation myth of the Protestant Irish. The most notorious atrocities took place in the triangle formed by the mid-Ulster towns of Dungannon, Armagh, and Lurgan. The area of fertile land and dense English settlement around Loughgall and Legacorry (present-day Richhill) formed the epicenter; in contrast, the Scots settlements were, initially at least, left alone. A careful study of the depositions for Armagh reveals that the minimum figure for Protestants killed in this county alone was roughly five hundred out of a settler population numbering somewhere between three thousand and five thousand. The vast majority of the victims were unarmed civilians. Contrary to Protestant legend, however, there is no evidence of any plan for a general massacre of planters. The insurrection was initiated by the seizure of Charlemont Castle and other fortifications by a group of Gaelic lords led by Sir Phelim O'Neale, their declared aims being "the libertie of their religion," and "the recouery of those lands … vniustly held from them."[31] Over the next two or three weeks settler families were robbed, stripped of their clothes, and expelled from their homes by groups of yeomen, laborers, and servants who were often their own neighbors or employees. For O'Neale, who was not only a substantial landowner, but also a London-trained lawyer and member of parliament, this explosion of popular grievances was clearly a very unpleasant surprise.

Sometime around the middle of November the first recorded massacres took place. The common feature was the apparently spontaneous slaughter of convoys of Protestant prisoners being transported by insurgents. Once again the violence was uncoordinated, reflecting the failure of O'Neale's planned coup rather than its success: the frenzied attacks on defenseless Protestants were carried out in the knowledge that the Catholic conspiracy to seize Dublin Castle had failed, and that settlers were mobilizing in various parts of the North and had already repulsed an insurgent force at Augher in Country Tyrone. The drowning of about one hundred Protestant men, women, and children at Portadown, and the burning of a group of prisoners in a thatched cottage at Kilmore, seem to have been precipitated by a bloody defeat inflicted on the rebels at Lisnagarvy (now Lisburn).[32] As with Scullabogue in 1798, the most notorious killings occurred not in areas where rebel forces were attempting to solidify their control, but where the improvised structures of rebellion were on the point of total collapse.

Religion played a vital role in the atrocities committed in Ulster and throughout the island, although it was not the *primum mobile* described in Sir John Temple's *History of the Irish Rebellion*, first published in 1646, and periodically reprinted, recycled, and updated over the next two and a half centuries. The crisis in Ireland was intertwined with events in the other kingdoms of Charles I, whose pretensions to royal absolutism had already provoked an uprising of Scots Covenanters in 1637 and deadlock with Puritan parliamentarians in England. The radicalization of religion in Scotland and England was a menacing development for Irish Catholics, who were increasingly excluded from political office on the grounds of confessional allegiance and were already fearful for the security of their landed estates. At the high-political level, the collapse of order throughout the British Isles was caused by what Conrad Russell called "the problem of multiple kingdoms," that is, the attempted centralization of three separate kingdoms, each with its own distinctive political and social structures, and the resistance provoked by administrative innovations. But in the British case (as in the Spanish Netherlands), a political crisis in a multiple kingdom was combined with a crisis of religious division with particularly toxic results. The impact of the Reformation and the consequent re-ordering of European states along confessional lines had produced a world where religious uniformity was regarded as essential to political stability. For a ruler to tolerate in one of his kingdoms religious beliefs that were prohibited in another was asking for trouble. To maintain, as the Gaelic and Old English lords had done, that adherence to the Church of Rome was compatible with loyalty to the English crown was to walk an increasingly precarious tightrope.[33]

The carnage of 1641 became so deeply embedded in the Protestant imagination, and has been exploited so tirelessly as evidence of Irish disloyalty and savagery, that historians have been deterred until recently from investigating the eight thousand witness accounts collected in its aftermath. Perhaps the most striking revelation in this extensive archive is the relative absence of the plantation itself as a motivating factor in the insurrection.[34] As order collapsed in mid-Ulster, the rebels began driving English settlers off their farms and taking their money, animals, clothes, and possessions. A frequent object of these house raids was the destruction of leases and other legal documents, particularly records of native debt, which suggests that the rebels were focused on redressing immediate economic grievances rather than the confiscation scheme that had been implemented more than thirty years earlier. Even in these early skirmishes, however, several depositions state that "their cheife malice was against Churchmen."[35]

As the disturbances spread across the island the "visceral hatred" of the settlers was evident in the humiliation of victims by stripping them of their clothes, but also in specifically sectarian forms of abuse.[36] Deponents recalled rebels urinating on bibles and prayer books as well as burning them, and the exhumation of Protestant remains from churchyards at the bidding of priests who would not consecrate the ground until "the hereticks bones were removed."[37] Although priests were sometimes singled out as the instigators of violence, some testimony recognized that they acted as a restraining influence, directing popular animosity against the symbols of Protestant worship rather than their persons. The familiar intersection of ethnic and religious hostility is clear in the deposition of William Wood, a yeoman from West Cork, who was warned by a band of insurgents that "all those that did not turne to their holy Masse, were damn'd; & that our religion was a new found religion inuented by Martin Luther and Caluin … and that they would neuer trust an Englishman vpon any occasion whatsoeuer, no more than they would a Turke."[38] The recurring insistence that settlers "turn to Mass" (another anticipation of 1798) was sometimes successful. If the geography of the rebellion can be explained by the extent of plantation in different parts of the island, and the resultant disruption of customary landholding practices, the ritualized character of the violence reveals the mobilization of local communities—men, women, and children—who seem to have defined their boundaries in essentially religious terms and who acted collectively to eradicate the pollutant of Protestant heresy from Ireland's soil.[39]

## III

During the eighteenth century many Protestants in Ireland continued to see themselves—in Burke's words—as "a sort of colonial garrison to keep the natives in subjection." It was unsurprising that Catholics continued to identify the reformed faith with the power structures that had dispossessed them. "The religion of this country," as William King lamented, "is rather a national faction than conscience."[40] This was as true of the cohesive Ulster-Scots communities of the north as of the native Irish elsewhere. Like King, archbishop of Dublin between 1703 and 1729, the more energetic bishops and pious laymen welcomed the penal statutes enacted during the reigns of William and Anne as a serious opportunity for Anglicans to remake Irish society in their own image. Recent historical research has uncovered powerful reformist impulses in the clergy, with spiritual renewal sought through episcopal visitations, the revival of convocation (the governing body of the church), voluntary societies, and charity schools—all vying for attention. The urgency of converting the natives was a frequent theme of Anglican sermons and presumably was a goal to which most thinking Protestants in some sense subscribed. Yet the scale of the problem and the economic sacrifices involved were dimly perceived.

Matters were complicated by the fact that many Anglican clergymen regarded the Presbyterian Synod of Ulster as a more pressing challenge than the dispersed and depleted Catholic hierarchy. Scotland's Reformation had been "radical" rather than "magisterial" in character in the sense that key phases of its development were carried out in opposition to the monarch. A long history of struggle with civil authority encouraged the adoption of what is sometimes called the "doctrine of the two kingdoms," the view that the powers of church and state are quite distinct and are strictly confined to their respective spheres. In a world where political obligation was usually grounded on religious duty, this was an explosive notion (and completely incapable of realization). Deprived of the backing of the civil magistrate, Presbyterians fell back on an ascending theory of power that grounded the authority of ministers in the will of their congregations rather than the top-down model of episcopacy. Their insistence that ecclesiastical government should remain free from state interference and should be organized on a sort of republican model set Presbyterians in Ireland, as in Scotland, at odds with the Anglican church.[41] On these issues each side detected in the other the very negation of true Christianity—or, as they were inclined to put it, the remnants of "popery."

Anglican reformers were hopelessly divided over priorities. Even the most conscientious bishops suspected independent initiatives, such as the reformation societies, which were reliant on laymen and sometimes involved Dissenters. Although some lay enthusiasts, such as the memorably named Abel Ram of Wexford, cultivated the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge in London, the predominantly Tory clergy looked to convocation as the proper instrument for restoring the dignity of the established church. While John Richardson of Belturbet drew up ambitious plans for a missionary drive led by Irish-language preachers, others believed that anglicization was the indispensable prelude to evangelization. In the meantime, surely Protestant backsliding, rather than popish superstition, was the proper target of a church with such meager resources? Consequently only two of the twenty-six charity schools in Dublin catered specifically to the Catholic poor.[42] By the 1720s King was leading a group of disillusioned Anglican bishops who attempted to block further penal legislation in the House of Lords. The contrast between the House of Commons's tenacity in seizing and redistributing Catholic estates and their failure, session after session, to improve the maintenance of Anglican curates provoked King to complain that the penal code had become a mechanism for controlling the natives rather than converting them: "Papists make the best Tenants," he observed sardonically, since "they pay more rent and are greater slaves to their landlords than protestants wou'd be."[43]

None of this is to argue that religious belonging was simply a convenient means of excluding Ireland's colonized populations from political and social power. The Protestant Ascendancy of the eighteenth century pitted its resources against a theological threat and against the ritual practices of Catholics, especially popular pilgrimages; above all it was locked in a struggle with an international organization supported by the great imperial monarchies of Europe. Protestants anxiously watched the trials of vulnerable Protestant communities on the continent. In 1580 roughly half of Europe had been Protestant; by 1680 the proportion had fallen to about one-fifth as Protestant princes were converted and grants of religious toleration revoked. It was King's consistent belief that the survival of Irish Protestantism was bound up with the fate of the "Protestant Interest" in Europe, and he compared the sufferings of Irish Protestants under James II to those of the Vaudois under the Duke of Savoy, the Hungarians under the Emperor Leopold, and the Huguenots under Louis XIV.[44] Conversely, the suppression of the Jesuits in all Catholic states between 1759 and 1773 and the introduction of toleration for Protestant, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish minorities throughout the Habsburg dominions by Joseph II broke apart the Protestant consensus on the penal code. Even before the French Revolution it seemed to some reformers that "popery" was decaying all over Europe and could not survive among the Irish "unless we prop up their superstition with their resentment, and keep their prejudices alive by maintaining our own."[45]

The Catholic hierarchy was even more likely to view Irish developments in a European context, not least because of its dependence on continental seminaries for education, intellectual creativity, and print. The Franciscan scholars who flourished at Louvain during the first half of the seventeenth century had reworked Irish historical sources into a new national narrative that stressed the continuity of Ireland's faith from the early Christian era, its unswerving loyalty to the papacy, and its resilience in the face of foreign persecution. It was at Louvain that the word *eithriceacht* ("heresy") was introduced into the Irish language.[46] The coalescence of political discontents and Counter-Reformation theology during the revolts of Elizabeth's reign left a difficult legacy for later generations of Catholic landowners and merchants keen to reach an accommodation with the Stuarts and Hanoverians. In 1727 and again in 1757 Catholic noblemen drew up statements repudiating the notorious deposing power claimed by the papacy; in both cases attempts at compromise foundered on the opposition of the Holy See itself as well as that of orthodox controversialists at home.[47] It mattered little that no pope had actually released his subjects from their duty of obedience since Elizabeth was excommunicated by Pius V in 1570. Theories of political obligation, monarchical power, and rights of resistance were now so entangled in Europe's wars of religion that Ireland's divisions could not easily be resolved within its own national boundaries. As the age of confessional states gave way to the age of revolutions, ecclesiastical leaders continued to view domestic politics through continental lenses. Both of the two great modernizers, John Thomas Troy (1739–1823) and Paul Cullen (1803–1878), spent their formative years in Rome, returned to Ireland determined to impose a more sanitized and ultramontane faith on their people, and consistently subordinated local demands for national self-government to the overriding struggle against the revolutionary creeds unleashed in 1789 and 1848.

The church that emerged from the penal era was a remarkable phenomenon: a fully functioning underground organization, maintained on a voluntary basis in direct opposition to the regime. By the middle of the century the full "titular" hierarchy of some twenty-six bishops had been re-established. Even more impressive, there was an effective parish school system over much of the island, operating in defiance of the penal laws, in which the Catholic catechism was taught. The Catholic Church was already a uniquely powerful alternative center of legitimacy and discipline, a shadowy state within the state. Its only significant rivals for popular allegiance were the secret oath-bound fraternities of the Whiteboys, Rightboys, and Defenders, who erected their own alternative structures of power on behalf of the oppressed; on occasion these groups attempted to regulate clerical dues and even the administration of the sacraments, threatening their priests with the same ritual punishments they applied to land agents. The ecclesiastical organization was also vital to a series of "national" bodies, including the Catholic Convention of 1792, the first democratically elected body in Irish history, and O'Connell's Catholic Association of the 1820s.

It was the French Revolution that convinced British statesmen that Ireland's Catholic hierarchy, for so long a potential source of subversion, might become a powerful stabilizing influence. In the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion Dublin Castle worked closely with Archbishop Troy on the passage of the Union, convinced that the benevolent neutrality of the hierarchy was essential to its success.[48] The political and social influence acquired by the Catholic Church enabled it to impose a confessional system of education on the British government in the 1830s. In addition to primary and secondary schools, the clergy effectively controlled reformatories, industrial schools, and orphanages. More than any other single factor, the church's direction of educational and welfare provision would ensure its extraordinary dominance in independent Ireland.

## IV

The main challenge to "official" church doctrine was not Protestant heresy but the resilience of popular religious customs, which revolved around the seasonal calendar and the ritualized practices surrounding holy wells and other places of local pilgrimage. The following description of a pilgrimage was written in 1682 by Sir Henry Piers, an associate of the Dublin Philosophical Society (and a Protestant), but the essence of the passage and the unease of the author were typical of the two centuries between 1650 and 1850. At Lough Derravaragh in County Westmeath there was an ancient chapel cut out of a nearby rock, where the "natives" made their way on the first three Sundays of the harvest season, barefoot for some of the stages and walking on their knees for others, over stone and gravel. Having paid their devotions, the mood of the people was quickly transformed:

> they return with speed to a certain green spot of Ground and here fall a dancing and carousing the rest of the day for the Ale sellers in great numbers on these days have here their booths as in a Fair and to be sure $y^e$ Bagpipes fail not to play their attendance. Thus in Lewd and obscene dances with Excess of drinking the day of their devotion is ended so as one who now should see $y^m$ would think they had been celebrating a Feast to Backus rather than their penitentialls or the memory of any pious saint.[49]

What particularly disturbed observers of these local community rituals was the promiscuous combination of solemn devotion and libidinal energy. Here the orthodox Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation overlapped untidily with older means of imposing order on the common people's relationships with the natural world and with one another.

How far was Catholic doctrine actually internalized by the laity? Unfortunately Irish historians do not have the visitation returns available for some European kingdoms, where special commissioners were dispatched to assess the beliefs of both the clergy and their congregations. It was a basic requirement of the episcopal office that a *relatio status* describing the material and spiritual condition of each diocese be submitted to the Holy See every ten years. In the fifty years between 1720 and 1770, however, only seven of these documents were returned for the entire country, causing the cardinal prefect at Propaganda Fide to lament "*una quasi generale mancanza in tutti i vescovi Irlandesi.*"[50] In Dublin the first archbishop to fulfil this obligation was John Carpenter, as late as 1780. The mixture of complaints and consolations he records is broadly representative of the hierarchy's sentiments between roughly the 1730s and the 1830s:

> Quoad populi mores haul [*recte* haud] mirum videbitur quod in urbe regni totius principe, ea que tam conferta ac nimia popinarum multitudine scatente in tanta hominum colluvie non obstantibus q[ui]bus-c[u]mque increpationibus ac monitionibus grassetur plurimum vitium ebrietatis, aliaque inde nata, q[ua]lia sunt blasphemiae, imprecationes, praecipites ac temerariae Divini nominis usurpationes, jejunii violationes etc. Ad n[imi]rum tamen accredit solamen quod non exigius [*recte* exiguis] fidelium numerus ab his aliisque vitiis ab horrens vitam ducat vere Christianam, ac Sacra[me]nta Paenitentiae et Eucharistiae semel singulis mensibus ac saepius devote frequentet.
>
> [Concerning the behaviour of the people, it will hardly seem strange that in the capital city of the whole kingdom, so densely packed and teeming with such an excessive multitude of inns, in such a vile confluence of people, notwithstanding all sorts of rebukes and warnings, the vice of drunkenness is most rampant and the other faults arising from it, such as blasphemy, swearing, and taking the Lord's name in vain, and breaches of fasting. But it is certainly a consolation that no small number of the faithful shuns these vices, and they are leading a truly Christian life, faithfully attending confession and Eucharist once each month or more.][51]

The progress of Tridentine reform is rather like the rise of the bourgeoisie, detected by scholars in a bewildering variety of periods, ranging anywhere from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the 1770s to the post-Famine era, when it becomes subsumed within the concept of the devotional revolution. Such terms as "the Tridentine ideal" are employed so casually by Irish historians that it is worth considering what compliance with the standards defined by the Council of Trent (1545–1563) might actually have entailed. Annual meetings of bishops were instituted in Tuam (1752), Cashel (1775), and Armagh (1779); regular meetings of the four metropolitans were held from 1788. But central aspects of Tridentine reform, such as the strengthening of episcopal control over diocesan priests, were achieved slowly, retarded by the penal restrictions of the eighteenth century. Others, such as the provision that each diocese should have a seminary for clerical training, were impossible. For many bishops the greatest struggle was to establish clerical control over marriage, hitherto constituted simply by the private exchange of promises and sexual intercourse, preferably in that order. If we turn to mass attendance we have no statistical evidence before the 1830s, when D. W. Miller has demonstrated that only 43% of Catholics attended on a given Sunday.[52] Although that figure might have been higher a century before, when the ratio of priests to people was more favorable, the overall picture cannot have been very different. Catholic revival, whether measured by the building of mass-houses, the keeping of parish registers, or the introduction of new devotions and religious fraternities, did not extend far beyond Dublin and the wealthy ports of Galway, Limerick, Cork, Waterford, and Wexford, together with their hinterlands.[53]

In understanding how the noticeably lax canonical practices of the pre-Famine era were transformed into the prodigious piety discovered by Francis Biever in the 1960s, the starting point is still Emmet Larkin's essay, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75" (1972), probably the most famous article ever published by an Irish historian. Although its timing and extent are fiercely contested, the transformation of religious observance described by Larkin has fascinated scholars ever since. The decades after the Famine saw the extension and improvement of church buildings, the achievement of almost universal mass attendance, and regular communion and confession. More intense, personal forms of devotion were facilitated by the new popularity of the rosary, forty hours, devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Conception, benediction, stations of the cross, novenas, and lay fraternities and sodalities. This was the origin of the extraordinary Marian piety that peaked at the height of the Cold War era, when Larkin embarked on his research. These new devotions coincided with a dramatic increase in the power and professionalism of the clergy, and the rigid discipline they apparently imposed on their congregations, manifested above all in a strict code of sexual morality.

What accounts for the extraordinary success of the devotional revolution in turning the mass of the Irish people into practicing Catholics within a generation? One obvious answer was the psychological impact of the Great Famine, but Larkin rightly dismissed that tempting suggestion as too neat. Unfortunately his preferred explanation was suspiciously convenient and equally unverifiable. This centered on the idea of an identity crisis brought about by the erosion of the Irish language and culture, creating a need for a new "cultural heritage" for the Irish.[54] Most subsequent historians have turned instead to the peculiarities of the demographic regime produced by the Famine. The trend toward the impartible inheritance of land produced a predominantly agrarian society ruled by large and middling farmers; it was characterized by the unusually high and persistent emigration of surplus children, relatively late marriage, and high celibacy (the term still preferred by demographers for those who never married). The Irish "match" became a highly regulated mechanism for transferring property between two farmers in which physical desire or affection between the bride and groom was a distinct bonus rather than a shared expectation.[55] The rigidities of the typical Irish family strategy created a society based on repression: large numbers of young people were raised for the inevitability of the Atlantic passage; parents were separated from their children; sexual gratification was deferred, forsworn, and consequently despised. On this reading the church simply supplied the moral and psychological rationalization for emotional austerity. As Paul Blanshard (a Protestant atheist if ever there was one) caustically observed in 1953, Irish priests had "exalted virginity to the point where it is almost a national catastrophe."[56]

The restructuring of Irish rural society after the Famine has become the default explanation for Ireland's devotional *Sonderweg*. Like most explanations for large-scale shifts in popular belief, this one is frustratingly incapable of being either proved or disproved, in spite of its attractions. Disconcertingly, no scholar has ever outlined the sort of mechanism by which a moral code derived from the social organization of *rural* Ireland could have been transferred to the inhabitants of towns and cities who lived at some remove from the matrimonial bargains struck by country people. In accounting for Ireland's fidelity to Roman discipline and devotion from Cullen's time, we might do better to return again to the long penal era, which had consolidated a kind of "popery" no longer sustainable in countries where Catholicism was the established religion. Everywhere in early modern Europe, and not only in Protestant territories, rulers had increased their control over church affairs in their borders, not least in the area of ecclesiastical appointments.[57] In eighteenth-century Ireland, in contrast, the hierarchy operated a kind of counter-establishment that directly opposed the institutions of the British state while sometimes working alongside them. The clergy remained dependent on the voluntary contributions of their people. Gallican tendencies were consequently muted. Irish students in Paris periodically got into trouble for their vitriolic attacks on Jansenist theology and their embarrassingly zealous support for the papal bull *Unigenitus* (1713). Here, as in other continental controversies, Irish priests acquired a reputation for extreme orthodoxy or, as it were, ultra-ultramontanism.

If the driving force behind the devotional revolution remains uncertain, there is a clear consensus among historians on two fundamental points. One is that there is nothing primordial about Irish Catholic devotion. The popular notions that Catholic piety is somehow rooted in Gaelic tradition, or that Catholicism was the religion of the poor, courageously preserved through a century of persecution, do not stand up. In the 1830s mass attendance was weakest among the Gaelic speakers of the west, where it varied between just 20% and 40%. In contrast, the more anglicized and urbanized regions of the east and southeast achieved rates of between 40% and 60%, with pockets of higher concentration already emerging: the Wexford coast in particular already boasted attendance figures of 80–100%.[58] Among the determining variables the most important was the larger proportion of laborers and cottiers in the west—those sections of the population where canonical standards were lowest. The catastrophic collapse of this agrarian underclass brought about by the Famine of the 1840s decisively accelerated the social

and cultural dominance of the respectable farmers and shopkeepers from whose ranks the priests—whose numbers by 1870 had increased to 3,200—tended to come. The timing certainly supports the theory: both the distinctive social organization of rural Ireland and the Irish cult of self-denial stretched from the Famine to the 1960s. By the 1990s it was being superseded by the cult of self-realization so prevalent among its European neighbors, that is, of shopping and sex.

Second, we should not assume that the strict regulation of "company-keeping," which observers came to see as a defining feature of Catholic Ireland, was an external imposition. Sean Connolly's careful study of pre-Famine Catholicism found that sexual discipline was already well established in the decades after the Union and that the role of the Catholic priest was "to articulate and reinforce an outlook whose roots lay far deeper in the structure and assumptions of the society of which he was himself a product."[59] Its foundation was the threat posed by sexual irregularity to the efficient transmission of the family holding from one generation to the next. Indeed the fact that similar patterns of marriage existed among Protestants strongly suggests Catholic teaching did not determine marriage strategies but simply reflected them.

The more personal and inward spirituality of the devotional revolution existed in dynamic interaction with the rise of evangelicalism among the Protestant denominations. Evangelical revivalism experienced its first significant growth spurts in the predominantly Anglican communities of Fermanagh and Armagh in the 1790s. Like the Orange Order, such early bodies as the Methodist mission and the Evangelical Society of Ulster seem to have been stimulated by the eruption of sectarian violence in the Ulster borderlands. Decades later the great revival of 1859 convulsed the Presbyterian recesses of Antrim and Down, complete with prostrations and other exotic manifestations of enthusiasm, particularly among females, which produced the same combination of elation and consternation among the local clergy as the apparition of the Virgin Mary in the unlikely location of Knock, County Mayo, twenty years later. Evangelicalism brought a new emphasis on religious activism, on godly living, on biblical orthodoxy, and above all on the centrality of the conversion experience. Its effects were particularly significant among the Presbyterians, where it contributed to the marginalization of the fading "New Light" tradition of the eighteenth century, which had identified itself with the cause of religious toleration to the point of rejecting all established religion. From the 1820s, the activities of Irish-speaking missionaries, gospel preachers, Bible societies, and town missions provoked the anger of the Catholic Church by crossing long-established communal boundaries. At the same time the emphasis on the cross and on scriptural authority, and the emotional intensity of conversion helped dissolve the differences over church government that had divided Anglicans and Presbyterians in the past.

In explaining the success of evangelical enthusiasm in nineteenth-century Ulster, David Hempton and Myrtle Hill have rejected the focus on "modernization" offered by older accounts, opting for a more subtle blend of economic tensions, psychological needs, cultural and regional characteristics, and the individual labors of true believers. They echo recent interpretations of British and American religion in allowing a generous measure of autonomy to the internal dynamics of religious faith. It is all the more telling, then, that Hempton and Hill repeatedly find that revivalism was linked to political upheaval. They demonstrate how the good news flourished in those areas shaken by industrial change and the revolutionary upheavals of the 1790s, where it counteracted social and political radicalism. They view 1859 as evidence for the theory that revivals flourish in "societies whose identity or cohesion is perceived to be under threat."[60] Like other regional subcultures in the north of England, south Wales, or parts of Scotland, Ulster Protestants experienced the social dislocations created by rapid industrialization. Uniquely, however, they also confronted the "sheer vigour of Irish ultramontanist Catholicism," its close connection with nationalist mobilizations, and the willingness of successive British administrations to renegotiate the constitutional guarantees previously offered to Protestants in order to conciliate the majority population.

Evangelical confidence in the moral superiority of Protestantism was apparently vindicated by the increased prosperity and material progress of the northeast. It connected local conflicts in the streets of Belfast with the global extension of the British Empire. A new mythology developed around the superior virtues of the Ulsterman, generally portrayed as dour, dogged, and democratic in spirit, "above all things, able to stand alone, and to stand firmly on his own feet."[61] When Home Rule threatened, the unionists responded that there was no homogeneous national community in Ireland, but two antagonistic populations separated by confessional allegiance, ethnic origins, political loyalty, culture, values, and economic development. If one of these merited special political arrangements, then so did the other. The barrister and historian Thomas Dunbar Ingram, onetime professor of jurisprudence of Hindu and Mohammedan Law in Calcutta, lamented the failure of the English and Scots to understand that "there are in Ireland, included under the generic term of Irish, two separate nations differing in origin, in religion, and in traditions."[62] That Protestants were actually outnumbered in five of its nine counties did not prevent "the Protestant province of Ulster" from becoming the trump card of unionist propaganda. Unfortunately "the Protestant province of Ulster," defined largely in terms of its allegedly superior moral fiber, was even less capable of territorial realization than the Irish nation, which demanded Home Rule and, after 1918, full self-determination.

## V

The identification of church and state after independence was close but never absolute. For one thing, the heritage of Protestant patriotism was too valuable to be discarded. Republicanism had been primarily a Presbyterian invention, after all, while the Gaelic revival of the nineteenth century had been pioneered by Anglican intellectuals. The memory of Wolfe Tone, the United Irishmen, and the rebellion of 1798 was a vital weapon in the propaganda war over the Six Counties, apparent evidence that under his tough skin the northern Protestant was essentially Irish. The imperative of national reunification thus provided a counterweight to the confessional tendencies of the southern state. Although the 1937 constitution recognized the "special position" of the Catholic Church, de Valera rejected the full Catholic polity urged by the bishops and the Vatican, ostensibly because it would antagonize Protestants, particularly north of the border. When Garret Fitzgerald embarked on his constitutional crusade in the 1980s, proposing to liberalize social attitudes in the South, the rationale offered for reform was the unconvincing notion that Ulster Protestants would find unification a more appealing prospect once divorce was available in the Republic. Even the young Charles Haughey, galvanized by the first clashes between Northern Catholics and British troops, vowed that there was "nothing he would not sacrifice, including the position of the Catholic Church in order to get a United Ireland."[63]

The assumption that there was an almost umbilical relationship between Irish nationality and the Catholic faith was nevertheless evident in the intimacy between successive governments and the hierarchy. When Costello's coalition government took power in 1948 it sent a telegram to the Vatican assuring Pope Pius XII "of our devotion to Your August Person as well as our firm resolve to be guided in all our work by the teaching of Christ."[64] Such declarations of fidelity had become routine. The annual military parades marking the invocation of the Blessed Virgin as the patroness of the Irish army, navy, and air corps were rather more bizarre, even by contemporary standards. The first of these took place on October 7, 1951, when the president and the taoiseach joined Archbishop McQuaid in a solemn high mass at Arbor Hill Barracks, and the Irish military dedicated themselves to Mary, Our Lady, Queen of the Holy Rosary.[65]

McQuaid's influence with party leaders was formidable. The opening of his monumental archive has revealed the full extent of his role in the drafting of de Valera's 1937 constitution. The preamble and the definition of the national territory bear his fingerprints, as well as the prohibition on divorce, the articles dealing with educational and social policy, and the assertion that the proper place of the mother was in the home. During the "Mother and Child" affair of 1950–1951, when a scheme for the provision of free medical care for mothers and children under sixteen was vetoed by the hierarchy, McQuaid not only composed the bishops' attack on "Socialised Medicine" but helpfully drafted the government's response.[66] An extraordinary system of moral surveillance now radiated outward from the archbishop's palace in the suburb of Drumcondra. The archbishop's Vigilance Committee, established in 1954 to monitor Communism and "other anti-Catholic activities, such as Liberalism," included influential members of trade unions, the universities, the media, and the State Intelligence Services. McQuaid was regularly supplied with confidential information from Garda Special Branch and Army intelligence, including, on occasion, surveillance reports acquired from the London police. The amount of energy devoted to countering the Communist threat seems all the more remarkable when we consider that a U.S. Senate report in 1953 found that the main Communist group in the Irish Republic had a membership of about one hundred people.[67]

In explaining the vast power of the church and the remarkable efflorescence of Marian devotions between the 1930s and 1960s, the pressures of the Cold War have some role to play.[68] Just as much as Troy or Cullen, McQuaid was focused on the continental struggle to preserve Catholicism, this time in the face of Soviet Communism. The show trials of Archbishop Stepinac in Yugoslavia and Cardinal Mindszenty in Hungary prompted a demonstration in Dublin in 1949 attended by 150,000 Catholics in total, with thousands kneeling in the streets to recite the rosary, a devotion that had become associated with the crusade against Communism. But the enabling conditions of Catholic hegemony were created by the Irish revolution of 1916–1922. Secession from the United Kingdom removed the most obvious secularizing agent, the British government, which alone had the resources to expand the educational system—an alarming prospect for the hierarchy, whose overriding political priority was always the retention of clerical control over schools. The Easter Rising and its aftermath also eliminated a generation of experienced politicians habituated to operating in alliance with nonconformist Liberals at Westminster. The presence of Archbishop Walsh of Dublin and 200 priests in the funeral cortège of the republican hunger striker Thomas Ashe in 1917 signaled the switch from the constitutional politics of the Irish Parliamentary Party to a revolutionary movement, which, rather perversely, reinforced the forces of social conservatism and Catholic puritanism.[69]

Partition meanwhile severed the industrialized northeast from the Free State, further accentuating the dominance of the small farmers and their distinctive moral ethos. The division of the island into two mutually hostile jurisdictions weakened professional elites, already incapable of challenging the clergy in the South—at least until the expansion of the media in the 1960s. Even in academic circles there was no overt challenge to orthodox belief. At University College Dublin, McQuaid nominated the chairs of Ethics and Politics, Logic and Psychology, Education, Sociology and Metaphysics, all occupied by Catholic priests. The first lay lecturer in the Department of Politics was the eirenic scholar (and orthodox Catholic) John Whyte, who resigned his position when he was told by McQuaid to discontinue research on what became his classic study, *Church and State in Modern Ireland* (1970).[70] Some of the social sciences professors at University College Dublin—such as Father Fergal O'Connor, who had become a popular guest on the *Late Late Show*, or Father Conor Martin—were nevertheless quiet modernizers, and they had counterparts elsewhere in the clerical firmament. There was no Irish equivalent of *Slant*, the English journal founded in 1964 by Catholic Marxists including the literary critic Terry Eagleton, but the spirit of *aggiornamento* found echoes in such local journals as *Christus Rex*, *Doctrine and Life*, and *The Furrow* even before the Second Vatican Council completed its work. Combined with the new medium of television, the emergence of tensions between traditionalists and modernizers did much to puncture the air of mystique that had protected episcopal authority.[71]

In retrospect the stir surrounding John McGahern's *The Dark* (1965) appears as the emblematic cultural confrontation of the period. McGahern's precise, self-effacing prose described the close-knit communities of rural Ireland—their guilt complexes and hypocrisies, their commonplace civilities, and their apparently timeless funeral rituals. McGahern had admired Joyce's *Dubliners*, because it was written in a style that "never draws attention to itself" but enters the imagination by stealth; this is something that could equally be said of his own later novels, particularly *Amongst Women* (1990) and *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2001), which made him the most celebrated Irish writer of his day.[72] The setting for *The Dark*, his second novel, was the oppressive, patriarchal Irish countryside of the 1950s. Controversially, the word "fuck" appeared on its very first page—just six months before the theater critic Kenneth Tynan notoriously used the f-word on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). (To be exact, McGahern spelled out "F-U-C-K," while Tynan stammered "f-f-fuck.") Worse still, the book describes the adolescence of a boy torn between habitual masturbation and a vocation for the priesthood. The boy's fantasies are first ignited by a newspaper advertisement for ladies' depilatory cream. (The erotic potential of such advertisements was clear to McQuaid, who once complained that advertisements for women's underwear in the *Irish Press* revealed the *mons pubis*—if scrutinized through a magnifying glass.)[73] McGahern consequently lost his job as a national schoolteacher, apparently at the insistence of McQuaid himself. Any hopes of reversing the decision were scuppered by his recent marriage to a Finnish theater director and translator, which had taken place in a London registry office: "And what anyhow entered your head," asked the general secretary of the Irish Teachers Union, "when there are hundreds of thousands of Irish girls going around with their tongues out for a husband?"[74]

Reading McGahern's account of his dismissal today, what stands out most is the unspoken compromises and complicities that characterized a society where overt confrontation with Catholic dogma was still unthinkable. McGahern was treated sympathetically by his school colleagues, while the discomposed headmaster advised him to apply for a job in London, promising to supply the necessary references. England was, by the 1950s, the preferred destination of the deviant and disruptive elements in Irish society—the intellectuals and iconoclasts, single mothers, homosexuals, and eventually the pop stars—along with its large surplus laboring population. Without this pressure valve, it is unlikely that the tensions in Catholic Ireland could have been contained for so long. But England was also the source of such magazines as *Women's Own*, with their inflammatory advertisements for the removal of "unwanted hair."[75] From England, too, came the Catholic periodical *The Tablet*, sufficiently progressive to outrage McQuaid and Bishop Browne of Galway.[76] The traffic of people across the Irish Sea had important cultural implications, long before cheap air fares made regular visits affordable. Reports reached Drumcondra that a "disturbingly large proportion" of Irish immigrants in Britain lost their "purity" in boarding houses and dance halls across the water, the problem being that the Irish were innocent of sexual matters while the English youth were "saturated in unwholesome knowledge" and corrupted by the prevalent "atmosphere of paganism."[77]

Post-war Ireland is probably best seen as a distinctive variant of a Western pattern rather than an exception to it. Reflecting on the dominant explanations offered by scholars of secularization—the unprecedented affluence of the long 1960s, the new independence and mobility of young people, and decline of community pressures on individual behavior, the transformation of gender roles and sexual behavior, even the conflicts in the churches themselves over modernization—it seems arguable that the main difference between Ireland and its neighbors is principally one of timing.[78] A survey of Catholic university students in the mid-1970s found that although eight in ten attended weekly mass, a clear majority (56%) rejected the church's position on contraception. Fewer than three in ten accepted the doctrine of papal infallibility or the proposition that the Catholic Church is "the one true Church."[79] If, as cultural historians often observe, much of Europe did not actually experience the Sixties until well into the Seventies, then most of Ireland had to wait until the Nineties.

Responsible historians should pause before writing obituaries for Catholic Ireland. Yet the forces ranged against the old faith are formidable. Even without the extraordinary catalogue of clerical abuse, corruption, and hypocrisy uncovered in the Ferns Report and other public inquiries, conventional Catholicism was unlikely to thrive in the era of Ryanair, Father Ted, and the condom vending machine. Optimists might object that the Republic of Ireland census of 2011 showed that 84% of the population regard themselves as a Roman Catholics. But those with "no religion" had almost doubled their numbers in just five years and now reached 13% among twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-olds. Meanwhile it has been suggested that national identity in the South has lost the Catholic communal basis so striking in the early decades of independence and has become refocused on the institutions of the twenty-six-county polity; Southerners accordingly express a greater sense of political and psychological distance from *both* communities in the North.[80]

In Northern Ireland too there is a significant trend toward disaffiliation from the churches, with more than 10% of the population choosing "no religion" in the 2011 census. Although the figures for weekly church attendance remain high—60% among Catholics and 34% among Protestants—there is a clear generational shift: the corresponding figures for those younger than thirty-five fall significantly to 42% for Catholics and 16% for Protestants. A detailed study of Belfast suggests that it conforms to the classic secularizing pattern, with churchgoers on both sides of the divide more likely to be female and middle-aged or elderly, with those younger than twenty-five and the unemployed poorly represented. Among Catholic women there is also a conspicuous difference in patterns of religious observance between housewives and women in paid employment (51% attending mass weekly compared to 37%).[81]

In their experiences of religious decline, as in so many other respects, analysis of the two Northern communities continues to reveal contrasting patterns. Although the overwhelming majority of Catholics attend church regularly, the clear tendency, among the young especially, is towards an *à la carte* approach to doctrine and away from regular confession. Almost half of those surveyed in the 1990s agreed with the view that individual conscience is more important than church teaching.[82] Half of all Protestants, meanwhile, attend church infrequently or not at all; but theological conservatism characterizes those who do and is particularly noticeable among young churchgoers, who overwhelmingly accept that biblical inerrancy and the experience of being "born again" are essential to true Christianity. Taken as a whole, Ulster Protestants have slipped behind their Catholic neighbors in their attachment to the key points of Christian faith—except for belief in the existence of hell, where, perhaps reassuringly, the steadfastness demonstrated by the two communities is more-or-less equal.[83]

## FURTHER READING

The history of the Irish churches was first written by Irish churchmen. J. S. Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, ed. W. D. Killen (3 vols., Belfast: William Mullan, third ed., 1867) is an outstanding achievement. The case for the established church is made by Richard Mant, *History of the Church of Ireland* (3 vols., London: John W. Parker, 1840). Perhaps the most influential work on the Catholic side was W. P. Burke's *The Irish Priests in the Penal Times, 1660–1760* (Waterford: Printed for the author, 1914): although it greatly overestimated the severity of the penal code, it contains rich information from the Irish Public Records destroyed in 1922. In the past fifty years the best denominational historians have kept pace with historiographical currents, as demonstrated by R.F.G. Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage* (Belfast: Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1985) and P. J. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985).

Modern scholarship, often sociological in its methodology and less reverent in tone, really begins with Emmet Larkin's seminal article, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75," *American Historical Review* 77: 3 (June 1972). Larkin's student, D. W. Miller, produced an equally bold, wide-ranging, and controversial thesis in "Presbyterianism and 'Modernization' in Ulster," *Past & Present* 80 (1978). Some of Larkin's arguments are qualified in S. J. Connolly's exemplary *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, second ed. 2001).

Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, second ed.,1998) proceeds at a level of generalization that will displease many historians but contains important insights, including his analysis of the Catholic mother. Reading Louise Fuller's *Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004) will cure the common misconception that the Catholic Church was monolithic. Roy Foster's sparkling *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970–2000* (London: Allen Lane, 2007) relates secularization to the social and cultural ferment of the late twentieth century, rightly highlighting changing attitudes to gender and sexuality as a key driver of change. Steve Bruce's classic *God Save Ulster: The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), explores the centrality of evangelicalism to what many Ulster Protestants still take to be the British way of life.

## NOTES

1. Frank Burton, *The Politics of Legitimacy in a Belfast Community* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), chapter 3.

2. Christoper Hitchens, *God Is Not Great* (London: Atlantic, 2007), p. 18.

3. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2007), pp. 23–24, 294.

4. Claire Mitchell, *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate 2006), especially chapters 2–3.

5. Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why Was Ireland So Poor for So Long?* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), p. 52.

6. Dennis Kennedy, *The Widening Gulf: Northern Attitudes to the Independent Irish State 1919–1949* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1988).

7. As brilliantly demonstrated in T. K. Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Upper Silesia 1918–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially chapter 4.

8. Marc Mulholland, "Why Did Unionists Discriminate?" in Sabine Wichert (ed.), *From the United Irishmen to Twentieth-Century Unionism: A Festschrift for A. T. Q. Stewart* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp. 187–206.

9. Senia Pašeta, "Censorship and Its Critics in the Irish Free State," *Past and Present* 181 (November 2003), p. 211.

10. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, edited with an introduction and notes by Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 202.

11. Best pursued in Don Gifford with Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses* (London: University of California Press, second ed., 1988).

12. R. F. Foster, "Protestant Magic: W. B. Yeats and the Spell of History," in *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), pp. 212–232.

13. Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 99.

14. B. F. Biever, *Religion, Culture and Values: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Motivational Factors in Native Irish and American Irish Catholicism* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), pp. 268, 306, 308.

15. James E. Bjork, "Beyond the Polak-Katolik: Catholicism, Nationalism, and Particularism in Modern Poland," in U. Altermatt and F. Metzger (eds.), *Religion und Nation: Katholizismen im Europa des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), pp. 97–118.

16. A. M. Greeley, *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003), pp. 70–71.

17. S.J.D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, c. 1920–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

18. L. Paul-Dubois, *Contemporary Ireland* (London: Unwin, 1908), p. 492.

19. William Shaw Mason, *A Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland* (Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 1814–1819), 3 vols., I, p. 591.

20. Andy Bielenberg, "Exodus: The Emigration of Southern Irish Protestants during the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War," *Past and Present* 218 (February 2013), pp. 199–233.

21. David Dickson, "The Demographic Implications of the Growth of Dublin 1650–1850," in Richard Lawton and W. R. Lee (eds.), *Urban Population Development in Western Europe* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), pp. 178–189.

22. Tone to Russell, 1 Sept. 1795, National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers, 620/16/3; A. C. Hepburn, *A Past Apart: Studies in the History of Catholic Belfast, 1850–1950* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1996), p. 4.

23. Thomas P. Power, "Converts," in T. P. Power and Kevin Whelan (eds.), *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), pp. 101–127.

24. Edward [Wetenhall], *A Sermon Setting Forth the Duties of the Irish Protestants, Arising from the Irish Rebellion, 1641 and the Irish Tyranny, 1688* (Dublin: Joseph Ray,1692), p. 13. This was a common formulation.

25. Richard Cox, *Hibernia Anglicana: or, the History of Ireland from the Conquest Thereof by the English, to This Present Time* (London: Joseph Watts, 1689), vol. 1, [C2$^{r}$].

26. The literature is reviewed in Karl S. Bottigheimer and Ute Lotz-Heumann, "The Irish Reformation in European Perspective," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 89 (1998), pp. 268–309.

27. Geoffrey Parker, "Success and Failure during the First Century of the Reformation," *Past and Present* 136 (August 1992), pp. 43–82.

28. Edmund Burke, *A Letter from the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, M.P. in the Kingdom of Great Britain, to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (London: J. Debrett, 1792), p. 43.

29. Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, "The Consolidation of Irish Catholicism within a Hostile Imperial Framework: A Comparative Study of Early Modern Ireland and Hungary," in Hilary M. Carey (ed.), *Empires of Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 25–40.

30. For a similar argument about the English Civil War, see Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 59.

31. Deposition of John Kerdiff, TCD, MS 839, f. 15r, 1641 Depositions Project (http://1641.tcd.ie/deposition.php?depID<?php echo 839012r013?>) accessed January 14, 2015.

32. M. Perceval-Maxwell, *The Outbreak of the Irish Rebellion of 1641* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994), chapter 10.

33. Russell, *Causes of the English Civil War*, chapters 2 and 3.

34. The fullest treatment is now Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapter 8. But see also Eamon Darcy, *The Irish Rebellion of 1641 and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2013), especially pp. 53–54.

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36. Canny, *Making Ireland British*, p. 541.

37. Deposition of Thomas Huetsonn, TCD, MS 813, fol. 260v, TCD, 1641 Depositions Project, http://1641.tcd.ie/deposition.php?depID<?php echo 813260r192?>) accessed January 14, 2015.

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39. For European comparisons, see Graeme Murdock, Penny Roberts, and Andrew Spicer, *Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davis and Early Modern France: Past and Present Supplement* 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

40. J. C. Beckett, "William King's Administration of the Diocese of Derry 1691–1703," *Irish Historical Studies* 4 (1944), p. 173.

41. Ian McBride, "Ulster Presbyterians and the Confessional State, 1689–1733," in D. G. Boyce et al. (eds.), *Political Discourse in Early Modern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001), pp. 169–192.

42. D. W. Hayton, "Did Protestantism Fail in Eighteenth-Century Ireland? Charity Schools and the Enterprise of Religious and Social Reformation, c. 1690–1730," in Alan Ford, James McGuire, and Kenneth Milne (eds.), *As By Law Established: The Church of Ireland since the Reformation* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1995), pp. 166–186.

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45. [Peter Burrowes,] *Plain Arguments in Defence of the People's Absolute Dominion over the Constitution* (Dublin: Thomas Webb, 1784), p. 53.

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48. Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question, 1690–1830* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), pp. 244–259.

49. Sir Henry Pyerce, account of Westmeath in "Common Place Book of Papers Relating to the Natural History of Ireland," TCD, MS 883/1, 299.

50. [Cardinal Leonardo Antonelli] to Archbishop Troy, 1 Oct. 1785, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Fondo Missioni, 117.

51. M. J. Curran, "Archbishop Carpenter's Epistolae (1770–1780)," part ii, *Reportorium Novum*, I: 1 (1956), p. 397.

52. D. W. Miller "Mass Attendance in Ireland in 1834," in Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller (eds.), *Piety and Power in Ireland 1760–1960: Essays in Honour of Emmet Larkin* (Belfast: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), pp. 158–178.

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56. Paul Blanshard, *The Irish and Catholic Power: An American Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), p. 149.

57. Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450–1700* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 74.

58. Miller, "Mass Attendance in Ireland in 1834," figure 7.5. Delightfully, one small pocket even appears on Miller's map as "over 100%."

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61. T[homas] C[roskery], "Ulster and Its People," *Frazer's Magazine* xiv (1896), p. 221.

62. Thomas Dunbar Ingram, *A History of the Legislative Union of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1887), p. 21.

63. Quoted in Briege Rice, "British and Irish State Responses to Militant Irish Republicanism, 1968–1971" (Thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2014), p. 161.

64. Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and the Vatican: The Politics and Diplomacy of Church-State Relations 1922–1960* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), p. xix.

65. See John Cooney's rather sensationalist *John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1999), pp. 288–289.

66. Cooney, *McQuaid*, p. 15.

67. David Connolly, "The 'Red Scare' in 1950s Dublin: Genuine or Generated? The Role of Archbishop McQuaid's Vigilance Committee" (Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2011).

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75. Pašeta, "Censorship," p. 204.

76. Cooney, *McQuaid*, p. 380.

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78. Compare the cases of Quebec and the Netherlands, where Catholicism was also implicated in wider political and social divisions: Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape (eds.), *Secularisation in the Christian World* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), chapters 7 and 11.

79. T. F. Inglis, "Dimensions of Irish Students' Religiosity," *Economic and Social Review* XI (1980), pp. 244, 247.

80. See John Coakley's excellent survey, "Religion, National Identity and Political Change in Modern Ireland," *Irish Political Studies* 17: 1 (2002), pp. 4–28.

81. Frederick W. Boal, Margaret C Keane, and David N. Livingstone, *Them and Us? Attitudinal Variation among Churchgoers in Belfast* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1997).

82. Boal, Keane, and Livingstone, *Them and Us*, p. 27.

83. Mitchell, *Religion, Identity and Politics*, p. 69.