Opposite Assumptions: The Relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and News Journalism in Ireland

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Introduction

The relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and news journalism in Ireland has long been problematic.[1] Reviewing the nature of the relationship between the Church and Irish journalism in the early 1960s, the Dublin archdiocese's "public image" committee recorded that many journalists believed that "the Church enjoys a special protection from criticism in the editorial and letter columns of newspapers other than the *Irish Times.*" The report also noted that it was "well known among journalists that certain newspapers have a policy of keeping off issues in which the Church may be involved."[2] Three decades later, the prominent journalist Fintan O'Toole declared that the Church and journalism were very much at odds. He noted that "journalism operates on the assumption that almost nothing is known, that everything has to be found out [while] the church operates on the opposite assumption: that everything that matters in known, has been revealed to us, and needs only to be interpreted correctly and acted upon." Since, O'Toole concluded, the Church was the font of traditional wisdom, the message from the Church was clear: "those who do not agree with us should shut up."[3] While each statement tells us something about the nature of the relationship between the Church and journalism in their respective eras, they tell us little about how that relationship changed over the decades. While many have correctly identified the scandals reportage of the 1990s as a fulcrum moment in the relationship between the Church and journalism (and indeed, the future of the Church in Ireland), it is important to acknowledge that the dynamics of the relationship had

[1] "News journalism" is taken to mean news journalism in the round and not religious journalism exclusively. In Ireland, the role of the Church extends beyond faith issues; it plays a central role in the education, health, and social welfare sectors and so it features in many news stories involving these sectors. News journalism also excludes religious programming as it does not fall under the remit of newsrooms.

[2] "The journalist and the church," undated but most likely late 1963 or early 1964, AB8/B/XXVI/e/78, Dublin Diocesan Archive, Holy Cross College (hereafter DDA).

[3] Fintan O'Toole, "Church values versus search for truth," *Irish Times*, February 21, 1991, 10.

been changing quite considerably long before these scandals came to light.[4] This article provides a structured reconnaissance of the relationship over the course of the twentieth-century and seeks to provide a framework for thinking about the primary forces that were in play within the relationship. While acknowledging that the relationship between social change and media change is complex, not always amenable to quantification or metrification, and open to continuous debate, the article conceptualizes the changing Church–media relationship in terms of: 1) the establishment of a national television station, required by law to be objective and impartial in terms of its news and current affairs output; 2) the increased prevalence of "outsider" journalism—that is content produced by non-native journalists for Irish publications, content produced by Irish journalists for overseas publications, and content produced by exile Irish journalists for overseas publications, all of which cast a cold eye on the nature of Irish society; 3) the emergence of new discourses that challenged the teachings of the Church and which were adopted by the mainstream press; and 4) the impact of new technology that, for a brief period, resulted in a flourishing, independent-minded periodical press.[5] By itemizing such change, one gets a fuller picture of the evolving nature of the Church–media relationship as it entered the contentious decade of the 1990s. The advantages of such conceptualization are that: 1) it invites use to take the "long view" of social change, thereby providing context to social debate; 2) it encourages us to consider the current situation in light of fuller rather than partial context; and, 3) it may help in thinking about the future trajectory of the relationship in the knowledge that hindsight is often the best form of foresight.

Political Independence and AutomaticDeference

Following independence from Britain in 1922, the nascent Irish Free State was engulfed in a short but bitter civil war between those who accepted and those who rejected the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, which partitioned the island into a self-governing dominion of twenty-six counties and a state-let of six counties that remained part of the United Kingdom. Allegations of

[4] For analysis of these scandals see Susie Donnelly & Tom Inglis, "The media and the Catholic Church in Ireland: reporting Clerical child sex abuse," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25, no.1 (2010): 1–19; Colum Kenny, "Significant television: journalism, sex abuse and the Catholic Church," *Irish Communications Review* 11 (2009): 63–76; Michael Breen, "The good, the bad, and the ugly: the media and the scandals," *Studies* 89 (2000): 332–38; Kevin Hegarty, "The Church and the Media," *The Furrow* 47, no. 2 (1996): 75–80.

[5] While it is important to note that such developments took place against the backdrop of momentous economic and social change, such as the adoption of free trade and the introduction of free second-level education, this article focuses on changes in the media-sphere.

treachery and competing claims to the mantle of Irish republicanism meant that one of the few cohesive elements in the new state was that of religion. Whatever view one took of the 1921 Treaty, the vast bulk of the new state's population was Roman Catholic: 92% of the population identified as Catholic in the 1926 census.[6] The Church predated the existence of the state and, as the undisputed arbiter of morality in Irish life, the hierarchy's annual message to the faithful—the Lenten Pastorals—were reproduced verbatim in the national and provincial newspapers.[7] These pastorals warned of the dangers of modernity. Foreign dances and music, alien dress codes, alcohol consumption, dance halls, risqué literature and British Sunday newspapers all received attention from the hierarchy in the early 1920s. What followed was a glut of legislation to address the hierarchy's concerns. The *Intoxicating Liquor Act* of 1924 reduced the opening hours of public houses, while a similar act in 1927 reduced the number of such establishments. Moreover, the *Public Dance Hall Act* of 1935 required the organizers of public dances to obtain a license from the state, with the result that dances were held only in parochial halls under the supervision of the Church. In the mid-1920s, a Church-led campaign against indecent literature and objectionable publications bore fruit, first in the establishment of the statutory Committee on Evil Literature and secondly in the *Censorship of Publication Act* of 1929, which allowed for the banning of contentious books and periodicals.[8]

Irish independence thereby constituted a political revolution rather than a social revolution, a point conceded in 1923 by the new state's minister for justice, Kevin O'Higgins, who described the new Irish political establishment as "probably the most conservative-minded revolutionaries that ever put through a successful revolution."[9] Thus, the first four decades of the new state (1920s-1960s) "were notable for institutional continuity rather than change" and that "economic orthodoxy, Catholic social teaching, and the doctrine of self-sufficiency had proved inhospitable soil for anything but a minimal state."[10] As well as adopting a policy of economic protectionism from 1932 onward, the state "was active primarily as the financier, not as the direct provider of services in key areas such as education—actual control remained with non-state institutional structures."[11] The dominant role of the Church as an "auxiliary state" was accompanied by political deference. All political parties were careful to publicly demonstrate

[6] Census figures taken from https://www.cso.ie/en/census/.
[7] For a review of the Church's role in Irish society see Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: UCD Press, 1998).
[8] For more see Michael Adams, *Censorship: The Irish Experience* (Alabama: Alabama University Press, 1968).
[9] Irish Parliamentary Debates (Dáil Éireann), vol. 2 (col. 1909), March 1, 1923.
[10] Richard Breen, Damien F. Hannon, David B. Rottman and Christopher T. Whelan, *Understanding Contemporary Ireland: State, Class and Development in the Republic of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1990), 1, 4.
[11] Richard Breen et al, *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, 21.

that their political programs did not contradict the teachings of the Church. The new Constitution of 1937, while granting freedom of religion, recorded the "special position" of the Church as the faith of the majority of the population.

The centrality of and deference to the Church in every aspect of Irish life was mirrored in the media sphere. As one commentator has put it, in this era

> the Church received obsequious and uncritical coverage . . . Bishops were a kind of Irish aristocracy. They lived in palaces and their consecrations were reported in the awed and sycophantic language used for the coronation of a monarch. In a drab Irish social landscape the purple worn by bishops added a cautious lustre to life. Their views were never questioned, motives were never analysed and clerical scandals were not considered within the realm of human possibility.[12]

All the national newspaper titles either championed the role of the Church in Irish society or knew that to critique it was to court public odium. The *Irish Independent,* established in 1905 after its proprietor William Martin Murphy had attended a conference that heard calls for the founding of a truly Catholic Irish newspaper, was distinguished most by its Catholic ethos; so much so that in 1954, as it celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, Dublin's Catholic Archbishop John Charles McQuaid praised its "policy of distinctive loyalty to the church."[13] As one journalist with the newspaper remembered, when writing about anything to do with the Church "blandness" was required: "You wrote 'nice' copy and nice copy meant the sub-editors did not have to entertain qualms about letting it through. It was eminently suitable to the era when the Catholic Church exerted an influence in Irish life that was awesome and it extended into what went into the papers and what stayed out."[14] In a similar vein, the *Irish Press*, founded in 1931 as the voice of the defeated anti-Treaty faction, was careful not to give any hint that those who had belatedly accepted the treaty were in any way a threat to the state or the Church's position within it. In the midst of the 1932 general election campaign, the *Irish Press* stressed that the political philosophy of its political master, Fianna Fáil, was in accord with the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*.[15]

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[12] Hegarty, "The Church and the Media," 77.
[13] Anon., "Fiftieth anniversary edition," *Irish Independent*, January 3, 1955, 12.
[14] Raymond Smith, *Urbi et Orbi and All That* (Dublin: Mount Cross Publishers, 1995), 2–3.
[15] Mark O'Brien, *De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press: The Truth in the News* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2001), 48.

There also existed a vigorous Catholic press. Established in 1888, the *Irish Catholic* was "a conservative-national organ, supporting the Irish Hierarchy in their corporate decisions on all religious and political matters," while *The Catholic Standard,* dating from 1928, was equally devoted to the church line, but in a more strident manner.[16] In particular, it kept a watching brief on the newspaper that represented the views of the state's minority Protestant population, *The Irish Times,* which of all the national titles was most likely to critique the power structures of Irish society. Established in 1859, the *Times* had editorialized against Irish independence and, post-independence, what it viewed as developments that impinged on the civil rights of the minority population—most particularly the compulsory learning of the Irish language and the introduction of literary censorship.

In such an environment, critical journalism was rare, made even more so by the fact that, for the most part, journalists in the early decades of the state's existence were under-educated, were poorly paid and endured poor working conditions. Attempts to unionize journalists were rebuffed by newspaper proprietors for almost three decades, until agreement on basic terms and conditions of employment were agreed upon in 1947. Thus, Irish newspapers generally reported developments but rarely critiqued them. Reflecting on this situation, one journalist noted that up to the 1960s Irish journalists were generally "a docile lot, anxious to please the proprietor, the advertiser, the prelate, the statesman." The era was, he argued, characterized by "an unhealthy willingness to accept the prepared statement, the prepared speech, and the handout without demanding the opportunity of asking any searching questions by way of follow-up." He concluded that the fundamental defect of Irish journalism during this time was "its failure to apply critical analysis to practically any aspect of Irish life."[17] Even when, as in 1951, the Church engaged in overreach in terms of influencing legislation, the response within the press was mixed. The Church's opposition to the government's planned introduction of free maternity education and healthcare for new mothers resulted in a clash between the reforming minister for health, Noel Browne, and his cabinet colleagues. When Browne resigned he sent the confidential correspondence between Church and state to the *Irish Times,* which ran it on the following day's front page and declared in a leading article that "the Roman Catholic Church would seem to be the effective Government of this country."[18] While the other two national newspapers—the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press*—reported on the political

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[16] See John Dunne, *Headlines and Haloes* (Dublin: Catholic Press, 1988).
[17] Michael O'Toole, "The Roman Catholic Church and the Media in Ireland," in Tony Fahy and Mary Kelly (eds), *Media Association of Ireland Essays* (Dublin: MAI, 1988), 11–14.
[18] Anon., "Contra mundum," *Irish Times*, April 12, 1951, 5.

fallout, neither commented on the controversy, as to do so would constitute adopting a position on the scheme that the Church opposed but that would have benefitted their readers. Such was the rigid media-sphere in which the Church's worldview—though occasionally challenged—reigned supreme. It was into this environment that the television was introduced.

The Introduction of Television

As noted by Robert Savage, the introduction of television broadcasting to Ireland was a drawn-out affair with a multitude of committees and commissions established to examine the issue, all of which involved input from the Church.[19] However, the ultimate decision-making about the introduction of Telefís Éireann (later RTÉ) was notable for its lack of consultation with the Church, being primarily the work of the minister for posts and telegraphs, Michael Hilliard. Hilliard resisted all suggestions from fellow ministers to dilute what he viewed as the need for the station to be strictly objective and impartial in its coverage of news and current affairs. Hilliard rejected, for instance, the suggestion that the new station be advised by religious and political advisory committees.[20] The requirement for the station's news to be objective and impartial was a radical departure for Irish journalism. Up to then, all national media organizations had been linked—tenuously or otherwise—to various interest groups, acting as the voice—official or unofficial—of such interest groups. As noted by one journalist, "television brought with it a new brand of vigorous, questioning journalism which required politicians and even clerics to explain themselves before the cameras. The new regime was almost as traumatic for print journalists as it was for the public figures who had to face the hostile environment of the TV studio."[21] The idea of needing to defend a viewpoint against competing interpretations was anathema to those who had never had to do so before—a concern captured in a report to Dublin's Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, which noted that of the sixteen producers hired by the new station, only four were Catholic. The producers appeared not to subscribe to the church's infallibility on social issues. Due to this, they were variously described as "a Liberal"; "a Left-wing trade unionist and writer"; "a divorced actress who has been associated with numerous left-wing groups for many years"; "violently anti-clerical"; "an admirer of Joyce, Yeats, etc."; "anti-clerical and […] against all forms of censorship"; "one of the leading Liberals here"; "a divorced Jewess . . . associated with the production of indecent plays in Dublin

[19] Robert Savage, *Irish Television: The Political and Social Origins* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996).
[20] Letter from government secretary to Hilliard, December 4, 1959 and Hilliard's reply, n/d, TSCH/3/S16748A, National Archives of Ireland.
[21] O'Toole, "The Roman Catholic Church and the media in Ireland," 11.

for some years."[22] An attempt by McQuaid to impose a "personal liaison priest in Dublin, the City and Diocese in which is situated the Television centre [to] facilitate the necessary consultations between the Television authority and the Archbishop of Dublin" failed when station management appointed a Dominican priest to the position of religious advisor.[23] In later years Kevin McCourt, who was then director general of the station, recounted how he and the chair of the station's governing authority, Eamon Andrews, "spent many hours . . . analysing, planning against giving the Hierarchy collectively or singly, any voice in control of programme-making."[24] Aghast at this move, McQuaid wrote to McCourt and insisted that he (McQuaid) was "the sole authority competent in matters of Faith and morals in the Diocese in which your station is situated."[25] McQuaid's asserted authority was refuted by the station the following month, when the liberal theologian Fr. Gregory Baum was interviewed on its *Newsview* program in relation to the Second Vatican Council. This prompted a next-day missive from McQuaid's secretary, Rev. James McMahon, requesting McCourt "to state by whose authority Rev. Gregory Baum, OSA, who appeared on a Telefís Éireann programme, was invited to speak and did speak in this Diocese on matters of Faith and Morals."[26] McCourt declared in a reposte that while the station was responsible for using Baum's services, it assumed "that if he required ecclesiastical clearance to participate in a programme of the kind involved, this would be a matter between him and the ecclesiastical authorities."[27] The message was clear: the station would pick its own experts to analyze and comment on current affairs and would not take direction from any quarter in relation to such content. It must be noted, however, that such conflicts were more prevalent in relation to light entertainment than news journalism.

In particular, *The Late Late Show* caused much friction between the Church hierarchy and station management. On one occasion, the show's host, Gay Byrne, asked a quiz contestant what colour nightdress she wore on her wedding night, and the contestant replied that perhaps none was worn. The following day's *Sunday Press*, which had been contacted directly by Bishop Tom Ryan, led with the bishop's condemnation of the show. As Tom Inglis has noted, the incident demonstrated "how the language of television with its emphasis on being sexy, exciting and entertaining was fundamentally at odds with the Church . . . a woman had confessed her sexual secrets to a man, but Gay Byrne was no priest and the television was no dark

[22] Undated report on Telefís Éireann, AB8/B/XXVI/a/3/54, DDA.
[23] Letter dated October 11, 1961, AB8/B/XXVI/a/3/9, DDA.
[24] Quoted in John Bowman, *Window and Mirror: RTÉ Television: 1961–2011* (Dublin: 2011), 67.
[25] Letter dated November 7, 1963, AB8/B/XXVI/a/3/9, DDA.
[26] Letter dated December 12, 1963, AB8/B/XXVI/a/3/71 and 72, DDA.
[27] Letter dated December 17, 1963, AB8/B/XXVI/a/3/70, DDA.

confessional."[28] When Archbishop McQuaid complained to the station's director general, Kevin McCourt, that the item show segment was "vulgar, even coarse and suggestive," McCourt observed that "television possesses some magnetism for risk-taking and for being racy, especially in the field of light entertainment."[29] Some weeks later, when a Trinity College Dublin student, Brian Trevaskis, criticized McQuaid for supporting literary censorship and referred to Galway's new cathedral as a monstrosity and its bishop as a moron, McCourt wrote to McQuaid to explain that "lapses from good taste and outbursts of bad manners on television programmes . . . may not necessarily be premeditated in themselves, but perhaps stem from the stimulation and exhibitionism sometimes created by television."[30] Several priests urged McQuaid to take action—"to see to it that the suave Mr. Byrne be prevented from providing a platform for the vermin of England, France, USA, or anywhere such vermin can be picked up"—but in effect, McQuaid was powerless to intervene.[31] In an attempt to move with the times, McQuaid established the Dublin diocesan press office in May of 1965. He also sent a young priest, Fr. Joe Dunne, on a three-month broadcasting course in New York. Dunne later initiated one of Irish television's most innovative programs. First airing in 1962, *Radharc* was initially a religious affairs program but soon spread its coverage into social affairs, covering such issues as young offenders, homelessness, Irish emigrants in Britain, and adoption.[32] As Robert Savage has remarked, "the series helped Irish society become aware of complex political and social problems both at home and abroad."[33] But the advent of *Radharc* was reflective of a curious duality within the Church's exposition of social affairs. Such issues could be discussed within the context and confines of an albeit enlightened religious program but not on the pages of national or international newspapers.

"Outsider" Journalism

The phenomenon of "outsider" journalism—content produced by non-native journalists for Irish publications, content produced by Irish journalists for overseas publications, and content produced by exile Irish journalists for overseas publications, all of which cast a cold eye on the nature of Irish society—was always a phenomenon that the Church had to contend with. While

[28] Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly,* 231–32.
[29] Letter dated February 15, 1966, AB8/B/XXVI/a/3/70, DDA.
[30] Letter dated April 5, 1966, AB8/B/XXVI/a/3/110, DDA.
[31] Letter dated May 13, 1968, AB8/B/XXVI/a/3/148, DDA.
[32] For an account of *Radharc,* see J. Dunne, *No Tigers in Africa* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1986).
[33] Savage, *Loss of Innocence,* 242.

in the early part of the century the Church could use its institutional clout to contain such journalism by putting pressure on journalists, editors, or newspaper proprietors, such tactics became increasingly less effective as the decades passed. Recalling his journalism career in Dublin in the 1930s, Australian journalist Chris O'Sullivan observed how the Church took exception to his family's non-attendance at weekly Mass, his role in the pioneering 1936 *Irish Press* investigation in the Dublin slum tenements, and how pressure was put on the paper's proprietor to sack him:

> The fact that I was not a conformist, not a Catholic, wasn't seen going to church, went against me. The priests actually threatened – they made me an offer with one hand and threatened me with the other: they said if you don't send your children to church, things will be very difficult for you. I was just, what you might call, what is called, a free thinker: but I did not want to be under the thumb of the church. The church was the biggest landlord in Ireland and rack-renter. . . . The church put pressure on de Valera to get rid of me.[34]

O'Sullivan was let go by the *Irish Press* in late 1936. Tim Pat Coogan, who became *Irish Press* editor in 1968, recalls that some of the journalists who had worked on the tenement series told him that "many of the slum properties excoriated by the series were owned by 'important personages'; including those of the Church."[35] A similar situation pertained in relation to journalist Liam MacGabhann who was the Irish correspondent for the London-based newspaper *The People.* MacGabhann demonstrated a rare independence of mind in his reportage on Irish society for a range of international publications. For the audacity of accepting an invitation to visit the USSR as a representative of *The People* in 1955, MacGabhann was denounced by the leading Catholic newspaper, *The Standard*, which accused him of "enjoying hospitality dispensed by the bloodstained hands of Kremlin murderers and persecutors."[36] This "virtual smear campaign," as one journalist described it, ensured that MacGabhann's regular appearances on Radio Éireann were abruptly ended.[37] On his return, MacGabhann was told by a station official

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[34] Interview of Chris O'Sullivan conducted by Andrew Reeves, July 26, 1978, National Library of Australia Oral History and Folklore Collection.

[35] Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (London: Hutchinson, 2003), 721.

[36] Anon., "Russia," *The Standard*, January 28, 1955, 1.

[37] Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930–1960* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998), 258.

that he was “no longer in good standing.”[38] Having been contacted by one of Archbishop McQuaid’s intermediaries, León O Broin, secretary of the department of posts and telegraphs, noted that he had been “disturbed by some talks given on Radio Éireann recently by Liam MacGabhann.” He had thus intervened to express disapproval, and steps were taken to avoid a recurrence: “talks by ‘Liberals’ and fellow travellers would be excluded as far as possible.”[39] MacGabhann also drew criticism from the hierarchy for reporting on the Church-inspired boycott of Protestant businesses and farms in the village of Fethard-on-Sea in 1957. In particular, his reporting on the boycott for *Time* magazine, which coined the phrase “Fethardism” to describe a boycott organised on sectarian lines, drew international attention to the conduct of the Church in Irish society.[40]

The Church also had to contend with Irish journalists who, having moved abroad, wrote about Irish society for overseas publications that circulated within the state. Having moved to Paris as a freelance journalist, Peter Lennon wrote for *Guardian.* After visiting Dublin in 1963, he profiled the country he had left where, he recalled, “it was considered normal to be perpetually on the way to confession.”[41] Lennon’s series “Censorship in Ireland” set out to examine “the extent to which Church and State prohibitions exist in Ireland, their true nature, and the effect of . . . widespread and deep-rooted systems of suppression.” Ireland was, he contended, “dominated by a handful of authoritarian, dogmatic figures who do not feel that they have to answer to anyone for their activities.”[42] Among the topics covered by Lennon was Church involvement in the education system, the university sector, and book and film censorship.[43] While Lennon acknowledged that there existed an enlightened cadre of clerics who criticized the status quo, he concluded that they almost always came up against a potent foe, Archbishop John Charles McQuaid.[44] The subject of Lennon’s final article, McQuaid was described as being “generally on the side of the obscurantists” and as exasperating “some of the young or intellectually mature members of the clergy who would like to see Ireland lifted out of its intellectual swamp.”[45] In his first article, Lennon noted that his series contained nothing blasphemous, indecent or obscene and invited Irish newspapers to reprint his series free of charge.[46]

[38] Anon., “The Pic-Man,” *The Pictorial*, August 6, 1955, 2.
[39] Memo dated February 11, 1955, AB8/B/XXVI/a/1/34, DDA.
[40] Tim Fanning, *The Fethard-on-Sea Boycott* (Cork: Collins Press, 2010), 102–04.
[41] Peter Lennon, *Foreign Correspondent: Paris in the Sixties* (London: Picador, 1994), 122.
[42] Peter Lennon, “Climate of repression,” *The Guardian,* January 8, 1964, 10.
[43] Peter Lennon, “Students in blinkers,” *The Guardian,* January 9, 1964, 8.
[44] Peter Lennon, “Turbulent priests,” *The Guardian,* January 10, 1964, 10.
[45] Peter Lennon, “Grey eminence,” *The Guardian,* January 11, 1964, 6.
[46] Peter Lennon, “Climate of repression,” *The Guardian*, January 8, 1964, 10.

No national title reprinted the series and only the *Irish Times* commented on the series.[47] It noted that *The Guardian* had been "fretting about the state of censorship and clerical authoritarianism here" before observing that "to speak up it is not necessary to squeal," as the issues identified by Lennon were "common in one form of another to organised societies anywhere." Nonetheless, it conceded that for such issues to be resolved it was essential "that they should be discussed and solved in the open."[48] As noted by Patrick Maume, Lennon's series "set the tone for a new era of public criticism" in which it was argued that "an Irish revolution intended to establish republican social and intellectual equality had been usurped by elites who presented themselves as unchallengeable, God-given authorities and who, by promoting an unreal, idealised image of the country, had blocked the discussion of grievous social problems."[49]

Such social problems were given increased coverage in the re-invented *Irish Times* of the 1960s. The title's move away from its Protestant heritage with the aim of being an impartial paper of record resulted in an intensification of "outsider" journalism within the title. Two appointments in particular—those of English journalist Michael Viney and American journalist Mary Maher—resulted in a colder eye being cast on the nature of Irish society. While Viney spearheaded the development of social affairs journalism at the paper, Maher led the re-invention of women's journalism. Viney and Maher were given the freedom to develop deeply-researched, social inquiry-based series on topics that had remained invisible in Irish media for fear of offending political or religious sensibilities. The topics addressed by Viney—"Mental Illness in Ireland" (1963), "Alcoholism" (1964), "No Birthright – the Unmarried Mother and her Child" (1964), "A World Made Mad – A Study of Schizophrenia" (1965), "Young Offenders" (1966), "Broken Marriages" (1970)—gave a very different impression of Irish society than that which had pertained up to then. Writing in *The Guardian* in 1965, Peter Lennon observed that Viney was able to write such articles "because he was trained outside Ireland and had a different set of nerves and conditional reflexes to Dublin taboos."[50] Recalling his arrival, Viney remembered he "found an Ireland virtually innocent of social inquiry or investigative journalism." His eight-part series "Young Offenders," published in 1966, was the first to indicate that not all was well in the industrial schools run by religious orders. Recalling the series, Viney noted he "was aware of treading on strange cultural and historical ground and of the absence of professional secular expertise and self-scrutiny familiar from Britain."[51] In his article on

[47] The *Southern Star* (a regional title) reprinted two of Lennon's articles.
[48] Anon., "Most distressful country," *Irish Times*, January 18, 1964, 9.
[49] Patrick Maume, "Peter Lennon," in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
[50] Peter Lennon, "Lifting the Irish curtain," *The Guardian*, January 19, 1965, 8.
[51] Michael Viney, "Response to child abuse report," *Irish Times*, June 12, 2009, 15.

Daingean, the largest industrial school, he observed that clerical vocation was "unsupported by any formal training in institutional child care [and they had] made little attempt to keep up with international writing, discussion and experiment in the care of deprived and delinquent children." Noting that such institutions had often been "regarded within their orders as places of banishment or refuge for inadequate or misfit religious," he concluded that "these were not the most suitable men to have the care of children."[52] Given his interest in social affairs, Viney's work was reviewed by Archbishop McQuaid's vigilance committee. It simply noted that "Viney, an Englishman and a non-Catholic, while presenting and writing reasonable articles on social issues is not an expert sociologist."[53] Since this was the first time that these topics had been investigated in detail in a public forum, many of Viney's series were reproduced in pamphlet form by the *Irish Times.* They also served as sociological texts in an Ireland in which the discipline was beginning to emerge. Viney's series also positioned these issues firmly within the public sphere as public interest affairs, and not the reserve of any one institution. While some of his topics had received once-off treatment in *The Bell* in the 1940s, Viney's series constituted the first sustained effort to migrate such issues from the private sphere of morality to the public sphere of politics and social affairs.

New Discourses

Adding to the creative disruption of the advent of television and sustained social affairs journalism was the reinvention of female journalism from the late 1960s and its adoption of new feminist discourses. Prior to the 1960s, the women's pages of all three national daily newspapers confined themselves to content that primarily centered on shopping, fashion, and cookery. One can argue that these women's pages maintained a media presence for women, but it is equally arguable that such an approach was commercially driven, depriving women of a political voice and relegating them to a house-bound citizenry.[54] Critiquing such content in 1939, Anna Kelly of the *Irish Press* observed that female reporters were all too frequently assigned to cover "social events where the description of frocks and hats were considered essential to the readers' happiness." Kelly observed that this situation was "based on the assumption that

[52] Michael Viney, "The dismal world of Daingean," *Irish Times*, May 4, 1966, 12.
[53] Report dated January 22, 1964, AB8/B/XXIII, 1.1.124, DDA.
[54] Louise Ryan, *Gender, Identity and the Irish Press 1922–37: Embodying the Nation* (New York: Edwin Mellin Press, 2002). For perspectives on women magazines see Caitríona Clear, *Women's Voices in Ireland: Women's Magazines in the 1950s and 1960s* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

women readers take no interest in general news, that they will read only news that has a feminine appeal – a specialised appeal to the interests of their own sex."[55] However, the publication of *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 by Pope Paul VI, which rejected the findings of the Papal Commission on Birth Control and reaffirmed Church teaching on the issue, coincided with the arrival of a new generation of female journalists. Inspired by the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963), journalists such as Mary Maher, Maeve Binchy, Nell McCafferty, June Levine, Rosita Sweetman, Nuala Fennell, and Mary Kenny reinvented the various women's pages of the national newspapers.

At the *Irish Times*, the new "Women First" page drew on feminist discourses to critique the patriarchal nature of Irish society, examining such issues as the prohibition on divorce, the ban on contraception, martial celibacy, and the absence of equal pay.[56] Significantly, it published an assertion by an anonymous Catholic priest that Dublin's Catholic Archbishop John Charles McQuaid was theologically incorrect in his assertion that the use of any contraception in any circumstance was morally wrong. The priest urged his ecclesiastical colleagues to accept that "there are circumstances, in cases of birth control, as in all other spheres of morality, which can lessen, and at times even remove, the guilt of those who break the law." He concluded that such an understanding was "not a denial of the law, nor a refusal to inform one's conscience as to what that objective moral law is, but simply a realisation that there is no such thing as an immoral act which is always morally sinful for everyone."[57]

At the *Irish Press*, the new "Women's Press" page was led by Mary Kenny and published articles such as a three-piece series of testimonies written by deserted wives, a provocative (for the time) quiz so that its readers could establish whether they were an "emancipated woman or sheltered lady," and a frank interview with the feminist Eva Figes.[58] In April 1970, the "Women's Press" page profiled Senator Mary Robinson, who declared that "for many people divorce and contraception are part of their civil rights."[59] The following September, Kenny

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[55] Anna Kelly, "Women in a newspaper office," *Irish Press*, February 10, 1939, 8.

[56] Anon., "Divorce and women's rights in old Ireland," *Irish Times,* June 13, 1968, 8; Mary Maher, "A short history of the pill in Ireland," *Irish Times*, March 14, 1968, 11; Maire Mullarney, "Marital celibacy," *Irish Times* August 1, 1968, 6; Mary Maher, "Equal pay: women are sick of nothing but promises," September 12, 1968, 6.

[57] Anon, "Contraception: the two basic problems," *Irish Times*, December 15, 1970, 6.

[58] 'Stephanie,' "A deserted wife," *Irish Press*, September 30 1969, 6; 'Rosemary,' "Deserted wives," *Irish Press,* October 1, 1969, 6; 'Ann,' "Deserted wives," *Irish Press,* October 2, 1969, 6; Mary Kenny, "Emancipated woman or sheltered lady – which are you?," *Irish Press,* July 6, 1970, 6; Rosita Sweetman, "Meeting Eva Figes," *Irish Press,* October 29, 1970, 8.

[59] Mary Kenny, "The young Senator who's fed up with parliament," *Irish Press*, April 30, 1970, 8.

and her *Irish Times* counterpart, Maeve Binchy, addressed clerical students at the national seminary in Maynooth. Binchy boldly told them that the day was gone when women were "going to take advice from celibate priests," while Kenny condemned the legislation "which makes you a criminal if you want to plan your family."[60] In a later article, Kenny attacked the arguments against the legalization of contraception ~~law reform in relation to contraception,~~ and concluded that Catholicism in Ireland was "in a pretty flabby condition if its rulings have to be enforce by coercive legislation by the state."[61]

The *Irish Independent* also sought to reinvent its women's page, though as the socially conservative paper of middle-Ireland, there was a limit such reinvention. The new "Independent Woman" appeared in 1970 with a "peace plan for the sex war" and an article on "the lethal side of electric blankets."[62] In many ways, "Independent Woman" was caught in a bind: with its competitors blazing a trail on substantive women's issues, it needed to make itself relevant. But, as the organ of conservative, Catholic Ireland, its readers objected when it tackled contentious issues. For example, when Janet Martin criticized the government's "downright refusal to look at the question of contraception" in an October 1970 column, a "regular reader" wrote to the paper to ask whether Martin was advocating that Ireland "follow England's example [and] allow the sale of contraceptives . . . despite the fact we would be breaking God's law by doing so?"[63]

The advent of this new female-activist journalism and its specific focus on reforming the ban on contraception chimed with the discussion-led current affairs and novelty-led light entertainment formats of the new television service. In October 1970, Mary Maher, June Levine, and Mary Kenny appeared on RTÉ television's *Late Late Show* and called for the establishment of "a liberation movement for women."[64] There followed the establishment of Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM) involving all the female journalists in a media-centric, publicly political campaign to reform family planning legislation. The release of the IWLM's manifesto, *Irish Women: Chains or Change,* outlined its demands in relation to equal pay, equality before the law, equal education, an end to the ban on contraception, rights for deserted wives, unmarried mothers and widows, and housing rights. The manifesto led to another appearance by the female journalists on *The Late Late Show* in March 1971. Later that

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[60] Tomas MacRuaire, "Presswomen speak at Maynooth," *Irish Press*, September 26, 1970, 3.
[61] Mary Kenny, "The contraceptive laws: the facts not the fiction," *Irish Press*, March 22, 1971, 6.
[62] Mary McCutchan, "Independent Woman," *Irish Independent*, September 1, 1970, 7.
[63] Janet Martin, "The facts about women's wrongs," *Irish Independent*, October 15 1970, 8 and 'Regular Reader', "Letter: rights, not wrongs," October 24, 1970, 7.
[64] Sheila Walsh and Noel Conway. "Press diary," *Irish Press*, October 13, 1970, 10.

month, Dublin's Catholic Archbishop John Charles McQuaid issued a pastoral letter describing the possible legalization of contraception as "an insult to our faith" and "a curse upon our country," prompting many IWLM members to walk out of the masses where it was read and hold a protest outside the archbishop's palace in Drumcondra.[65] While Linda Connolly has observed that the IWLM emerged in an "erratic, disorganised and chaotic fashion in 1970–2," its effectiveness lay in its media centricity.[66] The key impact of the reinvented women's pages was their role in prompting the establishment of the IWLM and in offering new feminist ways of thinking about issues such as contraception. The pages provided a platform for debate on the existing law, a mechanism for establishing social attitudes (through readers' surveys) towards legalization, and allowed for the articulation of personal experience in terms of how the ban on contraception impacted marital life, economic wellbeing, and physical and mental health. They also challenged political inertia on the issue and highlighted that the ecclesiastical ban was not as theologically watertight as some conservative forces would have the public believe. The pages forcibly placed these issues and the new way of analyzing them at the heart of the media and political agenda, refusing to let the issue revert into the obscurity it had previously enjoyed when it was discussed only in the context of Church teaching or literary censorship. More broadly, the pages altered the form and structure of women's journalism. In 1979 the national broadcaster initiated a radio show, "Women Today," that continued the coverage of issues pioneered by the women's pages.[67] Such issues also found a ready home in the periodicals that emerged onto the Irish media scene in the 1970s.

Periodicals

Referring to the emergence of a vibrant, independently-minded periodical sector in the 1970s, Malcolm Ballin noted that such journals "record the evidence of challenge and change, and their contents illustrate the complex and interwoven terms of the contemporary debate, which commanded for these periodicals a relatively small, but committed and growing audience."[68] By a quirk of technology, these periodicals benefited from the demand for color advertising which the national newspapers, by virtue of their largescale investment in older printing

[65] Anon., "Pastoral seen as challenge," *Irish Press*, March 29, 1971, 1, 4.
[66] Linda Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 129.
[67] See Betty Purcell, *Inside RTÉ: A Memoir* (Dublin: New Island, 2014).
[68] *Malcolm Ballin, Irish Periodical Culture, 1937–1972: Genre in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 42.

presses, could not afford to offer. By sub-contracting their print runs to facilities that could print in color, these periodicals held a near monopoly on largescale color printing in the newspaper and periodical market for a period of about ten years. As Ballin has noted, periodicals seek to "project an identity." Three periodicals in particular—*In Dublin* (1976), *Hot Press* (1977), and *Magill* (1977)—served as identity sounding boards for the views of a generation that had grown up in post-protectionist Ireland, that had benefited from expanded secondary and tertiary education, that had been exposed to alternative worldviews on television and reconstituted women's pages, and that was coming of age in an Ireland that no longer recognized the "special position" of the Catholic Church.[69]

Though launched initially as a listings magazine, *In Dublin* quickly evolved into a "features" led publication. One of its first campaigns was to initiate a readers' fund to help a Dublin theatre which had had its local government funding cut after it had hosted a visiting English theatre group, Gay Workshop.[70] The papal visit of 1979 and 1983 referendum to insert a ban on abortion into the Irish constitution were also milestones in the magazine's critical attitude towards what it viewed as the old order. An irreverent cover image of Pope John Paul II saw many newsagents refusing to stock the magazine, while in 1983 it published a special "Vote No" edition calling on its readers to reject the amendment.[71] In a similar vein, *Hot Press* was launched "in the belief that there was an audience for a politically aware, counter-culturally inclined magazine [and that] the deference shown to the Roman Catholic Church in all areas of Irish life, including the media, was entirely inappropriate."[72] While oriented principally towards coverage of the popular music industry, it also turned its "liberal spotlight on many of the country's pressing social problems, such as drug abuse, sexual mores and the lot of the marginalised while questioning the institutions and shibboleths that governed social life."[73] Oddly, for a youth-orientated magazine, it had a religious correspondent, Liam Fay, who cri-

[69] Ballin, *Irish periodical culture*, 2. The constitutional reference to the "special position" of the Catholic Church was removed in 1973 prior to Ireland's entry to the EEC, now the EU. Among the most prominent journalists included in this categorization are Vincent Browne, Kate Holmquist, Gene Kerrigan, Declan Lynch, Ferdia MacAnna, Eamonn McCann, Nell McCafferty, Emily O'Reilly, Fintan O'Toole, Mary Raftery, Helen Shaw, Sam Smyth, Colm Tóibín, John Waters, and Padraig Yeates.
[70] Anon., "Project Arts Fund," *In Dublin,* April 17-30, 1987, 5.
[71] *In Dublin*, September 1979 and August1983.
[72] *Hot Press* editor Niall Stokes, quoted in Joe Breen, "*Hot Press:* a tilt at all those windmills," in *Periodicals and Journalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, ed. Mark O'Brien and Felix M. Larkin (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 206–7.
[73] Joe Breen, "*Hot Press*," 204 and 213.

tiqued the more unusual beliefs and practices of clergy and faithful. The writers of the irreverent 1990's sitcom *Fr Ted,* Graham Lenihan and Arthur Matthews, also first met while working for *Hot Press.*

The third periodical, *Magill*, was launched by Vincent Browne. Browne identified the enforcement of "accountability on the part not just of public bodies but on the part of all institutions of power in society" as a key element that informed the magazine's journalism.[74] Thus, the Catholic Church became just another institution to be examined objectively. With cover headlines such as "The Battle for the Diocese of Dublin," *Magill* reported the candidates for the vacant archbishopric of Dublin as it would have reported the leadership contest of a political party.[75] It also lay bare the activities of lay-religious groups through in-depth features such as "Abortion – blackmail and backlash" (July 1982), "The secrets of Opus Dei" (May 1983), and "The secret world of the anti-divorce lobby" (May 1986).[76] All three magazines had a cross-fertilization of personnel from the new generation of journalists. Looking back at his involvement in the three magazines, journalist John Waters noted that "together they amounted to an Irish counter-culture" that helped the new generation to rebel "against the orthodoxy of the Ireland into which they were born, and against the orthodoxies of those who could see only one direction in which it could go."[77]

As the 1980s unfolded, this journalistic counter-culture was incorporated into mainstream journalism—a move that heralded something of a generational clash. On the one hand stood the Church, which propagated what it believed to be eternal and unchanging truth and which was populated by a generation of clerics who had never had to account for their public or private behavior or utterances. On the other stood a generation of journalists that believed in social change and public accountability from those in political, economic, and ecclesiastical power. This cultural clash was obvious to newspaper editors and clerics alike. Addressing reporters prior to the visit of Pope John Paul II to Ireland in 1979, *Irish Times* editor Douglas Gageby warned them that he did not want any "fashionable liberals sneering at the Pope."[78] Two years later, a bishop expressed disquiet at how journalists were increasingly likely to view Church spokesmen as "handing out propaganda," with the journalist seeing their task "as that

[74] Vincent Browne, "Editorial," *Magill*, January 1985: 13.
[75] Olivia O'Leary, "The legacy of Dermot O'Leary'" *Magill*, June 1984: 10–19.
[76] Pat Brennan, "Abortion – backlash and blackmail," *Magill*, July 1982: 14–24; Maurice Roche, "The secrets of Opus Dei," May 1983: 16–36; Emily O'Reilly, "The secret world of the anti-divorce lobby," May 1986: 8–14.
[77] John Waters, *Race of Angels*: *The Genesis of U2* (London: Fourth Estate, 1994), 102–3.
[78] Olive O'Leary, "Mr Gageby's Republic," in Andrew Whittaker, *Bright Brilliant Days: Douglas Gageby and the Irish Times* (Dublin: A&A Farmar, 2006), 47.

of brining a note of ‘objectivity’ into the proceedings.”[79] Amid the contentious referendum to insert a ban on abortion into the Irish constitution in 1983, another bishop criticized the manner by which certain topics that “exercised the greatest minds for centuries” were now “regarded as suitable topics for chat shows on radio and TV, in which speakers of little or no qualifications parade with confidence the most varying and contradictory opinions.”[80] Throughout the 1980s, the Church had to contend with alternative views to its own being, articulated in relation to issues such as the sacking of teacher Eileen Flynn (1982), the eighth amendment (1983), family planning legislation (1985), and a referendum on divorce (1986). By this time, many of the generation of journalists who had begun their careers at *In Dublin*, *Hot Press*, and *Magill* had migrated to national newspapers, treating Church pronouncements on any issue as just one side of a wider discussion that Irish society needed to engage in.[81]

Discussion and Conclusion

While the scandal reportage of the 1990s significantly changed the Church–media relationship in Ireland, it is clear that, post-1960s, the relationship entered a state of flux as a number of news media-related phenomena—the establishment of a national television service; “outsider” journalism; new, mediated discourses that challenged Church teaching; and the emergence of a vibrant, independently-minded periodical sector—altered the manner in which news journalism related to the Church. Such developments considerably changed the pattern of the relationship that characterized the first few decades of the state’s existence, arguably setting the stage for the tumultuous revelations of the 1990s. When those scandals emerged from the early 1990s onward, they did so in a media-sphere that had gradually moved away from a policy of automatic deference to a view of the Church as just another institution worthy of journalistic scrutiny and public accountability.

Today, Church-journalism relations in Ireland remain strained. As Tom Inglis has noted, the Church’s claim to divine truth is very much at odds with a world awash with competing worldviews—not just in news media but in social media that have saturated contemporary communication channels with content “based on self-expression, pleasure, entertainment,

[79] Brendan Comiskey, “Should Christians always lose?” *Irish Broadcasting Review* 12 (1981): 10.
[80] Fintan O’Toole, “Church values versus search for truth,” *Irish Times*, February 21, 1991, 10.
[81] For more on the Flynn case, see Mary Holland, “Why the Flynn case is so important,” *Irish Times*, March 13, 1985, 8. For more on the divorce referendum, see Emily O’Reilly, “The secret world of the anti-divorce lobby,” *Magill*, May 1986: 8–14 and Gene Kerrigan, “After the referendum,” in *Magill*, July 1986: 10–13.

consumption, debate, discussion, and controversy." [82] News media have also erred: on at least two occasions, news outlets leveled false allegations against religious personnel. In 1999 the *Sunday World* falsely reported that a nun in charge of a child-care center "was part of a religious-based paedophile ring." It later apologized and paid £175,000 in damages.[83] In 2011 RTÉ's television documentary "Mission to Prey" falsely alleged that a priest had impregnated a girl while serving as a missionary in Africa. The station was subsequently fined €200,000 by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, which noted that "there was a significant failure of editorial and managerial controls within RTÉ."[84] The station also paid a substantial defamation award to the priest concerned.

What the future holds for Church–media relations in Ireland is unclear. As one commentator has noted, the Church "has failed to evolve a pastoral strategy and language that resonates with the contemporary experience of the new Ireland." The Church needs to "purge itself of nostalgia for a world that has gone [and] accept that it cannot expect special treatment from the media."[85] Concurring with this view, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, noted how "one of the great challenges the Irish Catholic Church still has to face is that of strong remnants of inherited clericalism. The days of the dominant or at times domineering role of clergy within what people call the 'institutional Church' have changed, but part of the culture still remains and from time to time reappears in new forms."[86] Such views, however, seem to be in the minority within the Irish hierarchy. In a 2016 address, one senior prelate declared that Ireland "through its political and media establishments, seems determined to eliminate the engagement of the Catholic Church in the public sphere." He asserted that people "in these systems have developed a gratuitous cynicism" towards the Church and "desire its destruction, believing that it stands between the people and Ireland becoming a progressive society."[87] In response, a former newspaper editor noted that "the old deference is gone. The invocation of a higher spiritual authority doesn't reduce commentators to silence."[88] Diarmuid Martin has noted that the "opposite assumptions" model within Church–media relations persists, with "Catholic punditry [being] as ideological as the analogous secular punditry of the

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[82] Inglis, *Moral Monopoly,* 238.
[83] Paul Williams, "Rape nun's abuse pact with Smyth," *Sunday World*, July 11, 1999, 1, 6.
[84] Broadcasting Authority of Ireland: "Statement of Findings on *Mission to* Prey" (2012), 5.
[85] Hegarty, "The Church and the Media," 78.
[86] Diarmuid Martin, "Catholic Ireland: Past and Present," *The Furrow* 64, no. 4 (2013): 327.
[87] Justine McCarthy, "Under attack," *Sunday Times*, June 5, 2016, 15.
[88] Conor Brady, "Catholic Church has to open its eyes to the past to see its way forward," *Sunday Times*, June 5, 2016, 20.

other side." "Mature dialogue" remains conspicuous by its absence.[89] As the state moves to consider the introduction of assisted dying, mature dialogue is needed now more than ever.[90]

[89] Martin, "Catholic Ireland," 328.
[90] In October 2020, the Irish Parliament passed the first stage of the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020 which provides for "assistance in achieving a dignified and peaceful end of life to qualifying persons."