

Catholicism in Ireland, 1880–2016: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat

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Introduction

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Catholicism was a defining element of Irish national identity and the terms Catholic and Irish were virtually synonymous for three-quarters of the population. The identification of faith and nationalist political identity, first harnessed by Daniel O’Connell, strengthened during successive efforts to end the Union and emerged triumphant in independent Ireland. Catholicism was also a core element of national identity in France, Spain and Italy but identification alone did not prevent a steady decline in church allegiance in those countries. Ireland was different because, aside from the absence of an anti-clerical left wing, the Catholic Church played a significant role in the struggle for political independence and in the subsequent state-building project. Partition reinforced the association of political allegiance and religious affiliation on both sides of the border after 1920. In retrospect, the first four decades of independent Ireland were an exceptional era. For the first time in centuries, the Irish Catholic Church found itself without a rival institution or even ‘a dialectical sparring partner’ and it consequently enjoyed unprecedented influence and power.¹

Under the leadership of ultramontanist Cardinal Paul Cullen from 1852 until 1878, the Irish Catholic Church assumed a form that it maintained, remarkably, for over a century.² This was characterised by a strong allegiance to Rome; a vast institutional presence through control of Catholic education, health and welfare homes; a disciplined clergy under episcopal control; and a thriving ‘spiritual empire’ abroad. The exceptional popular piety of twentieth-century Ireland sprang from Cullen’s success in standardising

1 P. Connolly, ‘The Church in Ireland since Vatican II’, *The Furrow* 30 (December 1979), 760.

2 See C. Barr, ‘The Re-energising of Catholicism, 1790–1880’, in *The Cambridge History of Ireland* iii (forthcoming).

Irish devotional and liturgical life along Roman lines. As the Irish became the most practising Catholics in the world, with a busy calendar of church and devotional attendance, paradoxically they ‘corresponded more closely to the British Protestant churchgoing mid-Victorian norm’.³ A vastly expanded pastoral infrastructure of newly built churches was matched by swelling numbers of vocations as religious life became a means of upward mobility in Irish society. Between 1851 and 1901 the number of priests increased from about 2,500 to 3,700 and the number of religious sisters from 1,500 to 8,000.⁴ The Cullenite model that evolved was ‘a peculiarly Irish hybrid of Tridentalism puritanism’.⁵ It also fostered, however, a pervasive culture of clericalism that lies at the heart of the unprecedented crisis in which the Catholic Church is now mired. This championed a clerical elite, institutional loyalty, conformity, anti-intellectualism and resistance to change.

The power of religion peaked in the 1950s by which time the Catholic Church had become a lazy monopoly, the legacy of which is proving to be its greatest burden. The decline in the authority and pre-eminent position of the Catholic Church, the rise of secularism and the beginnings of the effort to dismantle legislative and constitutional support for a Catholic ethos can be traced to the early 1960s. Although identification with Catholicism and religious practice in Ireland remained atypically high and set Ireland apart from other parts of Western Europe, survey evidence since the 1970s has revealed dramatic change in the nature and practice of being Catholic. The inability of the institutional Church to respond to a rapidly changing Ireland prompted one commentator to ask in the early 1980s if Irish Catholicism was dying.⁶ As elsewhere, scandal has engulfed the Catholic Church in Ireland since the 1990s. Yet despite the dramatic failure of leadership and the loss of power, credibility and moral authority of the institutional Church, 84.2 per cent of Irish people described themselves as Catholic in the 2011 census. This suggests that despite a steep decline in institutional observance Catholicism remains an integral, if increasingly elusive, aspect of Irish identity.

3 S. Gilley, ‘Catholicism, Ireland and the Irish diaspora’, in S. Gilley and B. Stanley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Vol. 8 World Christianities c. 1815-c.1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 253.

4 E. Larkin, ‘The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–1875’, *The American Historical Review* 77 (1972), 626, 651.

5 L. Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2002), xxix.

6 P. Kirby, *Is Irish Catholicism Dying? Liberating an Imprisoned Church* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1984).

Church and Nation, 1880–1920

In an influential study David Miller has charted the efforts of the Catholic Church to remain on terms with both the 'state' (the British government) and the 'nation' (the Catholic population) in the final decades before independence.⁷ In return for advancing its interests, the Church was prepared to bestow its legitimacy on state and nation alike. For all Christian churches no concern was more supreme than the sensitive area of education, control of which was perceived as essential if faith and values were to be transmitted to future generations. William Walsh, bishop of Dublin from 1885 to 1921 and the pre-eminent Irish prelate, played a pivotal role in securing equality of educational treatment for Catholics at all levels. His crowning achievement was the establishment of the National University of Ireland in 1908 which met Catholic concerns.

The Catholic Church was not neutral between state and nation, however. It backed nationalist aspirations in the belief that the nation would eventually supplant the British imperial state. This required considerable political dexterity and moral and theological ambiguity on the matter of rebellion. From the 1880s until 1918 a majority of the nation was represented by the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) which sought Home Rule. As Alvin Jackson has shown (see above Chapter 4), the spectre of a southern parliament helped to unify Ulster Protestants of various political shades whose political, religious and economic interests were intertwined with the Union itself. An informal but highly effective clerical-nationalist alliance, cultivated by Parnell, was disrupted by the IPP split. It re-emerged, however, when the party was reunited under Redmond in 1900. There were limits to the political influence of the Church just as there was a variety of political standpoints within the hierarchy and among the clergy. Church authority was accepted in matters deemed to be within the ecclesiastical domain such as education. But where politics was concerned the Church had little choice but to demonstrate that it was of and with the people. To do otherwise would alienate the laity – a lesson learned during the Land War (1879–1882). For this reason Archbishop Walsh was concerned for the plight of the workers during the 1913 Lockout, though he successfully opposed a scheme to send their children to England when it raised the spectre of proselytism. Ireland's small urban working class was not divorced from religious belief and practice in contrast to large segments of the same class in Europe.

7 D. W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland, 1898–1921* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1973).

The third Home Rule crisis between 1912 and 1914 demonstrated the limitations of the hierarchy's political influence. John Redmond largely ignored its concerns about the financial and educational aspects of the measure. His acceptance of partition in 1914 alienated the northern bishops and their flocks who feared their interests would suffer under a Unionist government in Belfast. For Bishop Patrick McKenna of Clogher partition was 'repugnant to every patriotic Irishman no matter what his political views'.⁸ This was the beginning of a rupture with the IPP as the Church adapted itself to an Irish political landscape profoundly altered by an inoperative Home Rule measure, disenchantment with the First World War and the aftermath of the 1916 Rising. The Catholic Church's traditional abjuration of violence, so evident in its largely ineffective response to Fenianism in the 1860s, was moderated by caution in 1916. Strikingly, twenty-two of the 39 Catholic bishops and auxiliaries remained silent, including Archbishop Walsh. Bishops and clergy were sensitive to the transformation of public opinion occasioned by the ill-conceived government policy of executions, arrests and internment. The Church's alignment with majority nationalist opinion, embodied in the new nationalism of Sinn Féin, was demonstrated during the massive protest campaign against conscription in 1918 which the hierarchy declared was 'against the will of the Irish nation'. During the War of Independence clerical opposition focused on the violent methods employed but not on the goal of independence.

Catholicism Triumphant, 1920–1960

After the founding of the Irish Free State the Catholic Church was more secure and more confident than at any previous time; it had little to fear from rival churches and enjoyed close links with the state. The situation was very different in Northern Ireland. The 'traditional Catholicism' of twentieth-century Ireland, which has attracted widespread comment, generally refers to the period before the 1960s when the Church's approach to the laity was authoritarian, prescriptive and dogmatic.

The Irish Free State

A majority of Catholic Ireland supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which granted a significant measure of self-government but not a republic and could not prevent civil war. The Catholic Church played an important role in securing popular legitimacy for the fledgling Irish Free State. Prompted by

⁸ *Derry Journal*, 9 June 1916.

the government, the hierarchy strongly condemned the anti-Treaty side in October 1922. The bishops expressed horror at the destruction and loss of life and maintained that ‘no one is justified in rebelling against the legitimate government . . . set up by the nation and acting within its rights’.⁹ A sense of cultural identity constitutes a bonding power in most societies. In the aftermath of the conflict, Catholicism and the reification (if not active use) of the Irish language provided a sense of shared identity and cohesion clearly distinct from Protestant England.¹⁰ This may explain why remarkably little hostility was shown to the Church even by republicans threatened with excommunication during the civil war. Parish missions ‘served as instruments of reconciliation in communities that had been deeply divided’ by the conflict.¹¹ Similarly, the celebrations of the centenary of Catholic emancipation in June 1929 allowed the Free State to project an image of a country that was united, Irish, Catholic and free.

During the uncertainties of the 1920s, the Church offered the new state continuity, stability and an extensive organisational infrastructure with over 13,000 clergy and religious. In return, a relatively penurious government allowed the Church to consolidate and extend its institutional presence in the realms of education, health and welfare with minimal interference – a pattern which persisted until the 1960s. This suited the state as religious labour was cheap or free and the capital costs were met by fundraising from the flock. The well-established nineteenth-century archetype of denominational pillarisation in these spheres continued as before and differed sharply from most European countries. After 1922 the Department of Education had limited power over the management of primary and secondary schools which remained vested in the Catholic and Protestant clergy. The state paid the salaries of teachers but its influence was largely restricted to control of the curriculum and an inspection system to ensure minimum teaching standards.¹³ Church authorities flexed

⁹ Pastoral letter issued by the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, 10 October 1922 published in *The Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Freeman's Journal*, 11 October 1922.

¹⁰ P. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1985), 244.

¹¹ B. McConvery, ‘The Redemptorists and the Shaping of Irish popular devotion, 1851–1965’, in H. Laugerud and S. Ryan (eds.), *Devotional Cultures of European Christianity, 1790–1960* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 52.

¹² G. McIntosh, ‘Acts of “National Communion”: The Centenary Celebrations for Catholic Emancipation, the Forerunner of the Eucharistic Congress’, in J. Augusteijn (ed.), *Ireland in the 1930s: New Perspectives* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 87.

¹³ S. Ó Buíola, *Education Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), 6.

their muscles when the Vocational Education Act (1930), which provided continuation and technical education for 14- to 16-year-olds, was viewed as a threat to primary schools and to the curriculum of secondary schools. The hierarchy sought and secured the place of religious instruction in the vocational system as well as clerical representation on local vocational education committees.¹⁴ So modest was the state's role in education before the 1960s that General Richard Mulcahy, Minister for Education from 1954 to 1957, likened his function to a 'plumber' who 'will take the knock out of the pipes and will link up everything'.¹⁵

The Catholic Church and the Northern Ireland State

Despite the creation of northern and southern states, all the major Christian Churches continued to function as all-Ireland bodies. This was not without its challenges as Church members lived and Church institutions functioned in two states with very different cultural, economic and political milieu. Catholics accounted for 34 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland. Their experience before the 1960s was marked by a sense of being in but not of the state where 'their religion was their politics'.¹⁶ Antagonism initially characterised relations between Church authorities and the Northern Ireland administration, which was fond of depicting the Catholic population as disloyal. Two Catholic dioceses – Down and Connor and Dromore – are located entirely within Northern Ireland and four others (Armagh, Clogher, Derry and Kilmore) straddle the border. Their bishops opted out of the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 1923, which introduced local authority involvement in the funding and management of schools, at the price of receiving significantly lower state funding. Finance and control of schools therefore posed a perennial dilemma for the bishops who deeply resented the inadequate financial provisions for their voluntary schools, full control of which they zealously defended. After the Second World War opportunities occasioned by the welfare state saw the northern Catholic bishops adopt a more pragmatic approach as they moved from highlighting the injustice of the state to injustices within in. There was never any question that the political border would

¹⁴ See M. Clarke, 'The Response of the Roman Catholic Church to the Introduction of Vocational Education in Ireland, 1930–1942', *History of Education*, 40 (2009), 477–93.

¹⁵ *Dun Dealgan* cix, 1494 (19 July 1956).

¹⁶ M. Elliott, 'Faith in Ireland, 1600–2000', in A. J. Cunningham (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 201–17.

compromise the religious unity of the Catholic Church whose map image remained an all-Ireland one.¹⁷

A Catholic Habitus

The Irish Free State was not a theocracy but Catholicism was ‘effectively transformed into a civil theology’.¹⁸ That the political culture had a pronounced Catholic ethos was inevitable given the Catholic educational formation of a majority of successive generations of Irish elites in politics, business and public service, and the extraordinary level of religious homogeneity. The 1926 census revealed that Catholics comprised 93 per cent of the population; before partition they accounted for 73 per cent. As Tom Inglis has argued, a Catholic habitus – a way of thinking and acting in conformity with a systematic view of the world – permeated all social classes, and religious capital facilitated the acquisition of economic, political or social capital.¹⁹ And so, during the first fifty years of independence both church and state leaders, irrespective of political party, shared a desire to develop the country according to a philosophy of Catholic nationalism. As a result, the coming to power of Fianna Fáil under de Valera in 1932 was characterised by continuity in church–state relations, and ‘their lordships took to Fianna Fáil as prodigals who had finally given up their errant ways’.²⁰ The new government demonstrated its loyalty to Catholicism during the thirty-first Eucharistic Congress, an international showpiece of global Catholicism, held in Dublin in June 1932. Unlike France or Italy, no anticlerical party emerged in Ireland and this reflected the failure of left-wing politics to develop.

Until the 1960s there was an informal consensus between political and religious leaders. Although keen to avoid confrontation, ministers did not always submissively dispose as the bench of bishops proposed. For example, diplomatic relations were opened with the Vatican in 1929 despite the known opposition of the hierarchy. Similarly, the views of bishops who participated in the Banking Commission in 1938 and the Commission on Vocational Organisation in 1943 were dismissed by the state. There was a concern too

17 See D. J. P. Corráin, *Rendering to God and Caesar: The Irish Churches and the Two States in Ireland, 1949–73* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

18 D. V. Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?* (Dublin: Veritas, 2003), 32.

19 The term ‘habitus’ was coined by the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu; T. Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: UCD Press, 1998), 11–12.

20 M. P. McCabe, *For God and Ireland: The Fight for Moral Superiority in Ireland, 1922–1932* (Sallins: Irish Academic Press, 2013), 240.

for the constitutional rights of religious minorities. In 1931 the government rejected attempts to veto, on religious grounds, the appointment of Letitia Dunbar-Harrison, a Protestant and Trinity College graduate, as county librarian in Mayo. Much ink has been spilled over the ‘mother and child’ debacle in 1951 as a demonstration of government pusillanimity in the face of episcopal pressure. This was arguably less a church–state crisis than an internal government one. Firmer leadership on the same issue by Fianna Fáil two years later negated the misgivings of the medical profession and clumsy episcopal impulses to embed certain Catholic principles in social legislation.²¹ If anything, the ‘mother and child’ controversy brought public scrutiny to bear on the role of the Church, which came to be increasingly questioned.

Significant elements of the Catholic moral code were enshrined in law, particularly in the areas of sexual morality and family relations. Conservatism defined most aspects of Irish life between the 1920s and 1950s. For this reason, censorship of films (1923) and publications (1929), the prohibition of divorce (1925) and a ban on the importation and sale of contraceptives (1935) were broadly favoured by all the Christian Churches. Pope Pius XI’s encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) warned of the dangers of excessive state power and reinvigorated the Catholic social movement through its emphasis on solidarity and subsidiarity. It became a common theme in the pronouncements of the Irish bishops until the Second Vatican Council. The most important manifestation of the new Catholic social teaching in this period was Muintir na Tíre (people of the countryside), a community development organisation founded by Father John Hayes in 1931, which played an important role in the emergence of the discipline of sociology in Ireland.²²

There has been a tendency to overstate the influence of Catholic social teaching on de Valera’s 1937 constitution. Recent legal scholarship has emphasised the extent to which the document in fact reflected secular values such as respect for individual rights and separation of church and state.²³ Famously, article 44.2.1 recognised ‘the special position’ of the Catholic Church as the guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of citizens. Such recognition was common in Catholic countries. But ‘apart from massaging episcopal *amour propre*’, the 1937 constitution did not establish the Catholic Church or

²¹ The classic treatment of this episode is J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923–1971* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1971).

²² See M. J. Tierney, *The Story of Muintir na Tíre 1931–2001: The First Seventy Years* (Tippelary: Muintir na Tíre, 2004).

²³ See G. Hogan, ‘De Valera, the Constitution and the Historians’, *Irish Jurist*, 40 (2005), 293–320.

describe it as the one true church and recognised other churches to the chagrin of Cardinal Joseph MacRory, Catholic archbishop of Armagh and primate of all-Ireland from 1928 to 1945.²⁴ Instead it guaranteed not to endow any religion. The ‘special position’ clause was deleted with minimum fuss in a constitutional referendum in 1972 under the shadow of the Northern Ireland Troubles.

Hothouse Catholicism

Between the 1920s and the 1950s the institutional Church was at its most dominant and devotional practices by a devout and deferential laity, in addition to weekly attendance at Mass, were at their most visible and numerous. These activities included benediction, membership of confraternities and sodalities, pilgrimages, parish missions, processions, the rosary, stations, novenas, reading devotional literature (which was available in abundance), devotion to the Sacred Heart, the cult of the saints and their relics, and Marian devotion. Though well-established before independence with, for example, great Irish interest in Lourdes (which helped revive the Marian shrine of Knock in the 1930s), Marianism was particularly prevalent during the 1950s prompted by Pius XII’s proclamation of the Assumption in 1950 and the Marian year in 1954 to mark the centenary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception. James Donnelly argues that the upsurge in Marianism was a defensive strategy to combat changing social and sexual mores and anti-Christian forces.²⁵ Television displaced the family rosary and in the public realm Marian sodalities such as the Sodality of Our Lady, which in the 1940s boasted 250,000 members, went into sharp decline after the Second Vatican Council.²⁶ So too did the Legion of Mary, a lay Catholic organisation founded by Frank Duff in 1921 which focused on spiritual and social welfare (for example it addressed social problems such as homelessness and prostitution). In an Irish context it was a rare example of autonomous mobilisation by the faithful, for which Duff encountered opposition from the Dublin diocesan authorities.²⁷ Donnelly contends that some rosary enthusiasts redirected their energies towards the charismatic movement in the 1970s and towards the cult of Padre

24 J. J. Lee, ‘From Empire to Europe: The Irish state 1922–73’, in M. Adshead, P. Kirby and M. Millar (eds.), *Contesting the State: Lessons from the Irish Case* (Manchester University Press, 2008), 43.

25 J. Donnelly, ‘The peak of Marianism in Ireland, 1930–60’, in S. Brown and D. W. Miller (eds.), *Piety and Power in Ireland, 1760–1960: Essays in Honour of Emmet Larkin* (Belfast: Notre Dame Press, 2000), 252–83.

26 J. Donnelly, ‘Opposing the “modern world”: The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Ireland, 1965–85’, *Éire-Ireland*, 40 (2005), 1–14.

27 See F. Kennedy, *Frank Duff: A Biography* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2011).

Pio in the 1980s.²⁸ The showing of a film about Padre Pio to schoolchildren is believed to have inspired the first incident of moving Marian statutes in the mid-1980s.

At an official level, the absence of civic ceremonial resulted in a reliance on Catholic ceremonial such as special rites for the opening of the Dáil and other occasions.²⁹ Visitors to Ireland, both lay and clerical, marvelled at the extent to which Irish life was imbued with the language, symbols and rituals of Catholicism. But some, such as the American writer Paul Blanshard, criticised the cultural and social domination of the Catholic Church.³⁰ Despite legislative and moral protectionism, this period was a time of vigilance and fortress Catholicism. The menace of atheistic communism loomed large during the 1930s and became an all-consuming struggle during the papacy of Pius XII (1939–1958).³¹ At home, Saor Éire (a radical left-wing republican group) and a sister organisation, the Republican Congress, were condemned in 1931; while abroad there was great Irish interest in the Spanish Civil War, concern for the persecuted church in Hungary and Poland in the early years of the Cold War, and the collection by the hierarchy of £60,000 before the Italian general election in April 1948.³² Sermons and pastorals warned relentlessly of a litany of corrupting influences which threatened Ireland's moral purity: proselytism, evil literature, indecent Hollywood movies, immodest dress, courting in public, excessive drinking, secularism, materialism, and 'leakage of the faith' among Irish emigrants (many of whom fell away from religious practice). Dancehalls, or more accurately the opportunities they afforded for sexual immorality, were a clerical obsession. Patrick Kavanagh's fictional character Tarry Flynn, poet and bachelor farmer, greatly admired the Catholic religion 'because it kept girls virtuous until such time as he'd meet them'.³³ A prudish emphasis on subduing the passions of the flesh, a focus on sin and a pessimistic view of salvation were integral to the religious culture of the time

28 Donnelly, 'Opposing the "Modern World"', 201–21.

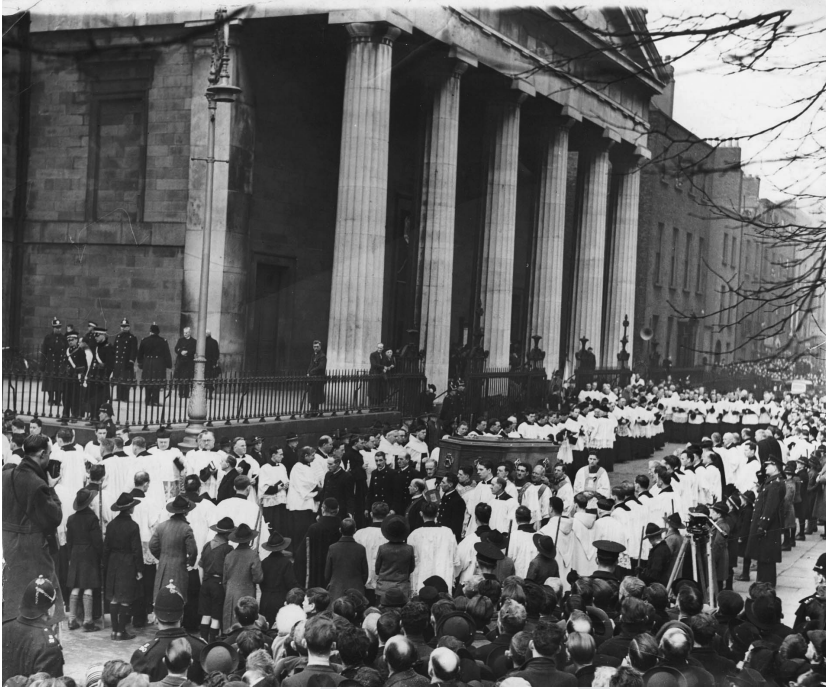
29 M. Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 'The power of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland', in P. Clancy, S. Drudy, K. Lynch and L. O'Dowd (eds.), *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1995), 609.

30 Paul Blanshard (1892–1980) wrote a number of books which enjoyed an international circulation: *American freedom and Catholic power* (1949), *Communism, democracy and Catholic power* (1951), *The Irish and Catholic Power* (1953) and *Freedom and Catholic Power in Spain and Portugal* (1962).

31 E. Duffy, *Saints & Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 352.

32 D. Keogh, 'Ireland, the Vatican and the Cold War: The [redacted] of Italy, 1948', *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), 931–52; Whyte, *Church and State*, 89–90, 166–7.

33 P. Kavanagh, *Tarry Flynn* (London: Penguin, 1978), 11.



32. The removal of the remains of Archbishop Byrne, archbishop of Dublin, from Clonliffe Church, Drumcondra to St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Marlborough Street, a distance of around 2.3 km. through the centre of Dublin, 1940.

(and depicted by Irish writers from James Joyce to John McGahern). The fear of losing eternal salvation, brilliantly evoked in Frank O'Connor's short story *First Confession*, led to a high attendance at confession.³⁴ Before the 1970s there was little hierarchical concern for public ethics and morality.³⁵

Until the Second Vatican Council, Catholicism was 'characterised by a legalistic moral theology, a highly centralised, authoritarian institution and a sentimental spirituality'.³⁶ In spite of the hothouse climate, there were, as Louise Fuller notes, dissenting voices which found an outlet in two pioneering journals: the *Furrow*, founded in 1950, and *Doctrine and Life*, launched in 1951.³⁷

34 F. O'Connor, 'First Confession', in *My Oedipus Complex and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 2005), 23–30.

35 J. J. Lee, 'Society and Culture', in F. Litton (ed.), *Unequal Achievement: The Irish Experience, 1957–1982* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1982), II.

36 Twomey, *Irish Catholicism*, 56.

37 See Fuller, *Irish Catholicism*, 82–8; J. Horgan, 'The Furrow: navigating the rapids, 1950–77', in M. O'Brien and F. Larkin (eds.), *Periodicals and Journalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 173–86.

When introducing *Doctrine and Life*, the Dominican provincial stated that its aim was to initiate people into a deeper understanding of their faith which ‘never became for them a personal conviction’.³⁸ Both journals communicated the ideas of European theologians and Catholic intellectual thought to Irish readers. This ensured that Catholic Ireland was not completely unprepared for the new thinking and renewal of the Second Vatican Council. Throughout the 1950s contributors warned repeatedly that Irish Catholicism was less secure than it appeared in the face of the rising tide of secularism. In 1959 one priest cautioned that an increasingly middle class Ireland was ‘trying to make do with a peasant religion . . . and we must have a religion to fit our needs’.³⁹ This observation underscored the bizarre absence of theology in Ireland, a country which lacked a critical Catholic philosophical tradition in public discourse and produced not a single Catholic philosopher of European stature in the modern era. The prohibition of a theology faculty was a condition of the hierarchy’s support for the establishment of the National University of Ireland in 1908. Perhaps ironically, Trinity College became the first university to introduce a theology degree for non-divinity students in 1979. Only in the twenty-first century did religious studies become a subject on the secondary school curriculum. As one commentator put it, ‘Ireland must be the only country in the world where lay Catholics were effectively excluded for a century from the option of achieving theological literacy.’⁴⁰

Irish Catholicism in Transition, 1960–c.1990

Modernisation was the zeitgeist of the 1960s and a changing economic, political and social landscape gradually dissolved the protectionist walls that surrounded Irish Catholicism. A variety of factors combined to transform Irish society and the place of religion within it. From the premiership of Seán Lemass onwards, political elites were no longer so deferential and the state prioritised economic growth over the simpler Catholic nationalist vision of Irish society that had prevailed since independence. Another major instrument of modernisation was the establishment of a national television service in December 1961. The expansion of the market and the media in subsequent

38 Foreword by T. E. Garde, *Doctrine and Life* 1 (February 1957), 2–3 cited in L. Fuller, ‘Critical Reflections on Irish Catholicism: Reading the Signs of the Times’, *Studies* 100 (2011), 479.

39 John C. Kelly, ‘Solid Virtue in Ireland’, *Doctrine and Life* 9 (October–November 1959), 120, cited in Fuller, *Irish Catholicism*, 65.

40 P. Kirby, ‘The Catholic Church in Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland’, in J. Littleton and E. Maher (eds.), *Contemporary Catholicism in Ireland: A Critical Appraisal* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2008), 29.

decades ‘ushered in a new habitus that was based on liberal-individualism, materialism and consumerism, the very things against which the Church had preached so vehemently for generations’.⁴¹ The shift from a culture of self-denial to one of self-indulgence was spectacularly evident during the Celtic Tiger era. It was belatedly recognised in the 1960s that the extension of educational opportunity was a central aspect of national economic development. This had profound consequences for a people used to unquestioning belief in their clergy. Yet another important stimulus of modernisation was the women’s movement. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and its aftermath revealed a sclerotic church institution in Ireland and a hierarchy more comfortable preserving rather than renewing its magisterium. To compound matters, vocations went into inexorable decline from the late 1960s.

Television

As Robert Savage notes (see Chapter 19, this volume), Ireland was one of the last countries in Western Europe to gain an indigenous television service. There was great anxiety at the challenge this posed to the Church’s authority as well as the potential moral dangers of foreign programming.⁴² The Catholic hierarchy had been slow to utilise the potential of the radio. High Mass on Sundays was not broadcast on a regular basis until 1948 and the daily broadcast of the Angelus was not inaugurated until 1950; both were at the prompting of John Charles McQuaid, the formidable **bishop** of Dublin from 1940 to 1972, who appointed a priest as his own liaison with Radio Éireann.⁴³ The hierarchy did not enjoy the same degree of informal influence after the implementation of the Broadcasting Authority Act (1960) which established the new television service and removed broadcasting from direct government control. The speed and force of television’s impact on Irish society far exceeded that of the cinema and the radio. With the relaxation of the laws on censorship, programmes such as the *Late Late Show*, an amalgam of American talk-show, light entertainment and current affairs, facilitated the questioning of traditional structures of authority that over time reduced the influence of and deference towards priests, bishops and even popes. Two contentious episodes in 1966 illustrated the new climate. In February Thomas Ryan, **bishop** of Clonfert, was ridiculed for criticising as indecent a quiz for

41 T. Inglis, ‘Individualism and Secularisation in Catholic Ireland’, in S. O’Sullivan (ed.), *Contemporary Ireland: A Sociological Map* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2002), 68.

42 R. Savage, *Irish Television: The Political and Social Origins* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 108–10.

43 M. Gorham, *Forty Years of Irish Broadcasting* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1967), 180–1, 195.



33. Archbishop John Charles McQuaid with schoolgirls at the centenary celebrations of High Park convent, Drumcondra. 1953.

married couples in which Eileen Fox could not remember the colour of her nightdress on her honeymoon as she had not worn any. The following month a student called Bishop Michael Browne of Galway a ‘moron’ and the cathedral in Galway a ‘ghastly monstrosity’.⁴⁴ The *Late Late Show* was the most watched and sometimes the most contentious programme on Irish television; it acted as ‘mid-wife to contemporary Irish liberalism’.⁴⁵

Broadening Access to Education

In 1965 *Investment in Education*, an OECD study of Ireland’s long-term educational needs, revealed that just one-quarter of those leaving primary education continued to second level. The compelling case for reform was not lost on Lemass who oversaw an unprecedented period of educational expansion

44 R. Savage, *A Loss of Innocence: Television and Irish Society, 1960–72* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 207.

45 Matthew Earl, ‘The Late Late Show, Controversy and Context’, in M. McLoone and J. MacMahon (eds.), *Television and Irish Society* (Dublin: RTE, 1984), 113 cited in L. Pettitt, *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (Manchester University Press, 2000), 166.

by appointing a succession of dynamic and assertive ministers: Patrick Hillery, George Colley, Donagh O'Malley. The most singular advance was the introduction of free post-primary education from the 1967 school year. Ironically, just as the number of school children began to increase, the number of vocations began to decline. John Walsh has revised the cordial characterisation of church–state interaction in this period put forward by earlier studies by revealing the 'profound suspicion and hostility with which Catholic bishops and managerial authorities greeted far-reaching educational reform' which undermined their hegemonic control.⁴⁶ Although the denominational character of schools remained unaltered, a new balance of power in education had been achieved in which the enhanced influence of the state in education was accepted with varying degrees of reluctance.⁴⁷ The replacement of one- and two-teacher schools with larger central schools, as recommended by *Investment*, illustrated the new reality. A public clash between Colley and Bishop Browne of Galway did not deter the Department of Education and by 1973, 1,100 small schools had closed. In Northern Ireland the 1968 Educational Act proposed grants of 80 per cent and public representatives on school management committees. Overwhelmingly supported by the Catholic laity, the financial imperative compelled the Catholic bishops to accept a position they had resisted since 1923. There was also a growing interest in integrated education in Northern Ireland, something which notably predated the Troubles.

The Women's Movement

The changing position of women was crucial in modernising Ireland, particularly from the 1970s onwards. Irish women challenged the patriarchal nature of Irish society and traditional church teaching on birth control and on the natural role of woman as mother and home-maker. Several commentators have noted that the Irish mother played a vital role in the development and transmission of Irish Catholicism from generation to generation, and in maintaining the prestige in which the clergy were held. Once women were able to access alternative sources of power through the workplace and public life, a central pillar of the Church's ideological control was removed.⁴⁸ The introduction of various equality directives following Irish entry to the

46 John Walsh, 'Ministers, Bishops and the Changing Balance of Power in Irish Education 1950–70', *Irish Historical Studies* 38 (2012), 109, 110. Older studies are Whyte, *Church and State* and Ó Buachalla, *Education Policy*.

47 Walsh, 'Ministers, Bishops and the Changing Balance of Power', 125.

48 See Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 178–200; B. Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture, 1930–1960* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998), 185–6.



34. 31st International Eucharistic Congress: Mass on O'Connell Bridge.

European Economic Community further empowered Irish women and brought the country more into line with its liberal Western European neighbours. Religious life was no longer one of the few means for women to access positions of power and responsibility.



35. Archbishop McQuaid with nuns at the High Park convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Refuge. The convent also contained a Magdalene laundry.

The Second Vatican Council and its Implications

The Second Vatican Council generated an expectation of change in the religious sphere which was ultimately unfulfilled. In his opening address Pope XXIII sought *aggiornamento*, the bringing of the Church up to date through the inner renewal of the Church, the unity of Christians, and the opening of the Church to the contemporary world. The proceedings between October 1962 and December 1965 were extensively reported by the world media. Catholic Ireland greeted the key deliberations – on the nature of the Church as the people of God, the collegiality of the bishops and lay participation in the mission of the Church – with optimism. By the council's conclusion, four constitutions, nine decrees and three declarations had scrutinised every aspect of Church life and transformed the Catholic Church. While the fundamentals of faith remained immutable, their adaptation to, and presentation in, the modern world did not. The Irish bishops were not in the van of *aggiornamento* and took a very limited part in the council sessions. The Irish ambassador to the Holy See described their attitude as 'the

reverse of exuberant'.⁴⁹ The Irish hierarchy was wary of change lest it undermine their magisterium or endanger the faith and morals of the laity. This was reflected in episcopal pronouncements following the conclusion of the council. Bishop William Philbin of Down and Connor warned against any suggestion that the Church could be 'cut adrift from its moorings by the Vatican Council' and McQuaid reassured a congregation that 'no change will worry the tranquillity of your Christian lives'.⁵⁰

The alterations to liturgy, church governance, theology, and ecumenism led to fractious division along progressive/traditional lines in North America and Europe but not in theologically impoverished Ireland, where the local implementation was legalistic, begrudging and narrow. Vincent Twomey puts it more strongly: 'unthinking to the end, a provincial and submissive Church simply and obediently carried out the instructions coming from Rome that unintentionally but effectively dismantled their own, deeply cherished version of Catholicism'.⁵¹ The use of the vernacular in the Mass was introduced on 7 March 1965 and sanctuaries were reordered to face the congregation. The council led to the creation of a spate of new episcopal commissions including, among others, Liturgy (1964), Missions (1968) and Justice and Peace (1969). A Catholic Communications Institute of Ireland was established in Dublin in 1969. A number of third-level institutions also came into being such as the Mater Dei Institute of Education in 1966 and the Milltown Institute of Philosophy and Theology two years later. Apart from participation as readers and ministers of the Eucharist from 1973, the laity remained on the margins of the Irish Church. The failure to permit women to play a significant role at all levels of decision-making within the Church continued; it took years before a dialogue was opened between the conference of priests and the hierarchy; and, unlike other countries, the Irish Church refused for decades to introduce the permanent diaconate.

The Second Vatican Council did not bring about any immediate change in interdenominational relations in Ireland. Official contact came to fruition slowly in the decade after 1963 as a result of international factors such as the rapprochement between Rome and Canterbury and, in the Irish context, low key ecumenical moves and the galvanising impact of the Northern Ireland Troubles. Unofficial local level contact between the churches helped

⁴⁹ Ó Corráin, *Rendering*, 20.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 206. On McQuaid see J. Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999); F. X. Carty, *Hold firm: John Charles McQuaid and the Second Vatican Council* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2007).

⁵¹ Twomey, *Irish Catholicism*, 35.

to overcome their mutual ignorance of one another. No issue poisoned inter-church relations more than mixed marriages (between a Catholic and usually a Protestant) and the Catholic Church's insistence under the *Ne Temere* decree that the children of such unions be raised as Catholics. The Church of Ireland viewed this as an instrument of slow strangulation, particularly in the Republic, where it was demographically weak. It was the root cause of the ugly Fethard-on-Sea boycott in 1957 when the local Church of Ireland community in a small County Wexford village was ostracised.⁵² The Second Vatican Council brought about a new attitude towards inter-church marriage in a *motu proprio* entitled *Matrimonia mixta* in 1970. It consciously recognised the Christian faith of other churches but the obligations incumbent on the Catholic partner to do all in their power to raise children in the Catholic faith remained. The implementation of *Matrimonia mixta* in Ireland was complicated by the Troubles in Northern Ireland and by Pope Paul VI's decision to let national episcopal conferences decide on the precise form of the promise. Catholic bishops in Switzerland, France, Germany and the Benelux accepted in principle that they could no longer insist on all children being Catholic. By contrast, the Irish Episcopal Conference was coldly juridical.⁵³

Misconceptions of a religious war in Northern Ireland provided the most pressing rationale for ecumenical entente at the end of the 1960s. Eric Gallagher and Stanley Worrall make the interesting assertion that had the Troubles occurred ten years earlier, the Churches would have taken sides as they did during the Home Rule crisis.⁵⁴ The Troubles forced Church leaders to question whether they were prisoners of the cultural and political polarities of Irish life, and in part responsible for the anguish in Northern Ireland. This resulted in the first official inter-church meeting at Ballymascanlon, County Louth in September 1973. The tendency in media circles to evaluate the progress of ecumenical dialogue in terms of the resolution of the Northern Ireland problem did a great disservice to both. Eric Gallagher captured the paradox of ecumenical advance against the background of the Troubles: 'the leaders of our Churches are probably – even certainly – having more contacts . . . than ever before. And at the same time the rank and file never had less and they never wanted less'.⁵⁵ Political violence posed particular difficulties for the Catholic Church. As Oliver Rafferty has observed, it was 'locked in

52 See Ó Corráin, *Rendering*, 93–7, 186–8.

53 Ibid., 188–91.

54 E. Gallagher and S. Worrall, *Christians in Ulster, 1968–1980* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

55 Ó Corráin, *Rendering*, 228.

a herculean struggle' with the Republican movement 'over the symbols and identity of northern Catholic life.'⁵⁶ Its sustained condemnation of violence had little impact and its actions were often misunderstood by the government resulting in a weak ability to influence the political agenda. Ganiel and Dixon suggest that over the course of the Troubles religion was, socially and politically, more important for Protestants than for Catholics.⁵⁷

In 1986 Seán Freyne, theologian and biblical scholar, suggested that the Second Vatican Council had 'made almost no impact on Irish Catholicism apart from a few cosmetic changes to the liturgy ... because the questions the Council sought to grapple with had never been seriously posed in this country'.⁵⁸ This focuses attention on the quality of episcopal leadership. Oliver Rafferty suggests that in recent years 'it has become something of a fashion among retired bishops to lament that Vatican II was not fully implemented in Ireland. But who was responsible for its implementation if not these same prelates?'⁵⁹ The Vatican system of appointment of bishops with little input by the local church has attracted criticism given the tendency to select 'the "safe" man and the orthodox mentality, for which the Church is paying in Peter's Pence today'.⁶⁰ Other appointees have had very limited pastoral experience; many others had, as one historian puts it, 'excellent negative minds'.⁶¹ Although religious orders have changed the way in which they exercise leadership and authority since Vatican II, this was not replicated in the institutional Catholic Church. During the long pontificate of John Paul II there was a 'disheartening return to an ethos of control and infallibility' as the legacy of the council was 'dismantled bit by bit, with significant teachings modified out of existence by a thousand qualifications'.⁶² This approach to Church governance was demonstrated in 2011 when a new translation of the missal was introduced by the Vatican with little prior consultation with priests or people, many of whom protested at the stilted language used.

56 O. Rafferty, 'Northern Catholics and the Early Years of the Troubles', in O. Rafferty (ed.), *Irish Catholic Identities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 356.

57 G. Ganiel and P. Dixon, 'Religion in Northern Ireland: Rethinking Fundamentalism and the Possibilities for Conflict Transformation', *Journal of Peace Research*, 45 (2008), 421–38.

58 Introduction to H. Küng, *Church & Change: The Irish Experience* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1986), 10.

59 O. Rafferty, 'The Catholic Church in Ireland and Vatican II in Historical Perspective', in N. Coll (ed.), *Ireland & Vatican II: Essays Theological, Pastoral and Educational* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2006), 11.

60 Fallon, *Age of Innocence*, 196.

61 D. Keogh, 'The Catholic Church in Ireland since the 1950s', in L. Woodcock Tentler (ed.), *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholicism since 1950 in the United States, Ireland and Quebec* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 105.

62 B. Hoban, 'How did it come to this?', *Studies*, 101 (2012), 401–2.

Missionary Activity

The focus on developments in Ireland should not obscure the remarkable level of missionary endeavour, both male and female, during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries whether following the British Empire into Africa and Asia, the Maynooth Mission to China (founded in 1916) or serving the Irish diaspora from Birmingham to Brisbane. Paul Cullen helped shape a transnational Irish ‘spiritual empire’ by having ‘Hiberno-Roman’ bishops appointed to every English-speaking national church in the British Empire.⁶³ Cullen’s ‘episcopal imperialism’ was complemented by his recognition of the need to ensure that lay emigrants were as ‘assiduous in the practice of their faith as those who remained’.⁶⁴ Mass migration from Ireland involved all denominations and the nineteenth-century missionary movement was therefore not confined to Catholic missionaries. Unlike Irish Catholics who, as Donald Akenson remarks of New Zealand, ‘simply refused to go away’, Irish Protestants had largely vanished as a category of self-identification by the mid-twentieth century.⁶⁵

The half century to 1960 was ‘the golden age of Irish missions’.⁶⁶ From the 1920s the number of Irish Catholic clerical and religious missionaries increased steadily until the 1970s when they plateaued at about 6,000 spread across Africa, Asia and Latin-America – the largest contribution per capita of any country.⁶⁷ In 2014 there were 1,600 Irish missionaries.⁶⁸ Missionary activity laid the basis for concern with the developing world from the 1960s. It paved the way for NGOs such as Concern, established in 1968; Trócaire, the Irish Catholic Church’s official overseas development agency founded in 1973 (with its distinctive Lenten collection boxes); and Goal established in 1977. ‘The missionaries’ work and that of the aid agencies that followed in their footsteps, became an extension of Irish values of Christianity, justice and peace, and their expression on the world stage.’⁶⁹

63 C. Barr, ‘“Imperium in Imperio”: Irish Episcopal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century’, *English Historical Review* 123 (2008), 611–50.

64 S. Roddy, ‘Spiritual Imperialism and the Mission of the Irish People: The Catholic Church and Emigration from Nineteenth-century Ireland’, *Irish Historical Studies* 38 (2013), 600–19.

65 D. H. Akenson, *Half the World from Home: Perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand, 1860–1950* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990), 196.

66 Gilley, ‘Catholicism’, 258.

67 On this see E. Hogan, *The Irish Missionary Movement: A Historical Survey, 1830–1980* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1992).

68 *Irish Independent*, 19 October 2014.

69 K. O’Sullivan, ‘“Ah Ireland, the Young Mania”: Exile and Irish state identity during the 1970s’, *Irish Historical Studies* 38 (2013), p. 481.

Falling Vocations

Remarkably, according to the 1961 census there were more religious (the vast majority being Catholic) in Ireland (15,323) than civil servants (14,695).⁷⁰ For the first time in the twentieth century decline in the total number of priests, brothers and nuns was recorded in 1968.⁷¹ Since then the power of the Church has waned due to the drying up of vocations. Without the human resources to staff the myriad of hospitals, welfare homes and schools Church's institutional presence inevitably contracted. Depleted ranks, increased running costs, greater state involvement, professionalisation of services, new management structures and a post-Vatican II reassessment of their mission prompted a withdrawal of religious. For example, the ratio of religious to lay teachers dropped from 18.9 per cent of trained primary school teachers in 1965–1966 to 4.6 per cent in 1992.⁷² In September 2014 only ten religious, half of them women, served as principals of post primary schools compared to 104 in 1991.⁷³ The day-to-day input into the religious ethos of schools has all but disappeared. The move away from the traditional ministries of education and healthcare towards pastoral and social ministries was facilitated by a post-Vatican II change in the mode of community life as smaller groupings of three to five religious replaced the traditional practice of living in large convents and monasteries.

This transformation did not arrest the slide in vocations, however. Between 1966 and 2006 vocations to all forms of religious life fell from 1,409 to 53, a decline of 96 per cent. This was most acute among religious orders, some of which are destined to disappear. The number of vocations to brothers' orders fell from 173 to 1, to clerical religious orders from 390 to 15, to sisters' orders from 592 to 9.⁷⁴ In 1967 there were 29,984 religious in Ireland, the majority women. By 2000 the total was 16,046 (10,987 sisters, 4,134 clerical religious and 925 brothers) with just 24 male and 21 female new entrants.⁷⁵ The decline in the number of female vocations was a sharp reversal of the gender balance of earlier decades. Although there was a similar

⁷⁰ T. Fahey, 'Religion and prosperity', *Studies* 90:357 (2001), 39, note 1.

⁷¹ *A Survey of Vocations in Ireland, 1971* (confidential report submitted to the hierarchy in June 1971), 3.

⁷² N. Ó Ghíolla Phádraig, 'The Power of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland', in P. Clancy, S. Kirby and L. O'Dowd (eds.), *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration), 607–8.

⁷³ B. Convery, 'Religious in education', *Reality* (September 2014) cited in E. Woulfe, 'Religious life in Ireland today', in Coll (ed.), *Ireland & Vatican II*, 219.

⁷⁴ *Vocations in Ireland, 1971*, 7; *Irish Catholic Directory* (hereafter ICD) 2016, 329.

⁷⁵ *Irish Catholic Directory 2001* (hereafter ICD), 282.

drop in numbers of religious in other western European countries, *fin-de-siècle* Ireland still had a significantly higher proportion of religious per head of the general population of 0.38 per cent; the corresponding figure for Italy was 0.205, Belgium 0.190 and Spain 0.171.⁷⁶ However, just over two-thirds of Irish religious were aged 60 or over. It is hardly surprising then that in 2015 the number of religious had declined further to 8,279 (6,282 sisters, 1,412 clerical priests and 585 brothers).⁷⁷ The magnitude of the post-Vatican II decline in vocations to religious orders was not unique to Ireland. There was a similarly rapid decline in North America and Western Europe. For instance, between 1965 and 1995 female religious in France declined by 44 per cent and male religious by 68 per cent; the respective figures in Britain were 43 per cent and 82 per cent.⁷⁸

The contraction in the number of diocesan clergy in Ireland was not as drastic or as swift as in other Catholic countries. In France the number of ordinations fell from 646 in 1965 to 99 in 1977, whereas in Ireland the respective decline was from 282 to 141.⁷⁹ However, by the late 1990s, as for religious orders, falling ordinations had reached crisis point with deaths, withdrawals and retirements far outstripping new entrants. Between 1966 and 2006 the number of diocesan vocations fell from 254 to 28, a decline of 89 per cent.⁸⁰ In 2012 there were just 12 vocations, the lowest number on record. This recovered modestly in 2015 when 17 seminarians began their training for Ireland's twenty-six dioceses.⁸¹ During the 1990s seminaries in Dublin, Thurles, Kilkenny, Waterford and Carlow closed; only the national seminary in Maynooth remains. At a parish level, an aging and declining cohort of priests have increasing demands on their time and energy. In 2015 there were 1,966 active priests assigned to parish ministry, a fall of 1,010 since 2000 and almost half the 1961 total of 3,702.⁸² The average age of an Irish priest in 2015 was 64. The future looks bleak. By 2020 the Dublin archdiocese will,

76 E. Maxwell, 'Apostolic Religious life in Ireland and Western Europe', in M. J. Breen (ed.), *A Fire in the Forest: Religious Life in Ireland* (Dublin: Veritas, 2001), 58–60.

77 J. Weafer, 'Statistical Profile of Religious Personnel in Ireland', in Breen (ed.), *Fire*, 31; Diocesan returns, ICD 2016.

78 R. Stark and R. Finke, 'Catholic Religious Vocations: Decline and Revival', *Review of Religious Research* 42 (2000), 125–45.

79 S. Tippet-Spirtou, *French Catholicism: Church, State and Society in a Changing Era* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 142; *Vocations in Ireland, 1971, 1977, 1997, 2007, 2012* (ICD 1978, 325. Of the 141 ordained in 1976–1977, 57 were ordained for Irish dioceses, 17 for foreign dioceses, 55 for religious orders and 12 for missionary societies.

80 *Vocations in Ireland, 1971*, 7; ICD 2016, 329.

81 ICD 2001, 282: www.catholicbishops.ie/2015/08/24/seventeen-seminarians-commence-priesthood-studies-saint-patricks-college-maynooth/ (accessed 13 June 2016).

82 ICD 1962, 653; ICD 2001, 284; ICD 2016, 329.

by its own estimate barely have one priest for each of its 199 parishes.⁸³ In many dioceses parishes are now clustered. Greater lay ministry will be required to sustain the Church into the future when there may be no ordained minister to conduct services. It makes more glaring Dermot Lane's observation that the most serious deficiency in the decades since the Vatican Council was the failure to activate the priesthood of the laity as outlined in conciliar documents and more recent ones such as the *Vocation and Mission of the Laity* (1988).⁸⁴

Declining Levels of Orthodox Religious Belief

Even in the early 1960s, survey evidence revealed an incipient but unmistakable change of religious outlook. Bruce Biever, an American Jesuit, conducted an elaborate survey of Catholic attitudes towards religion and clerical authority in Dublin in 1962. This captured the prominent role of religion and the clergy in everyday life but signposted a more challenging future for the Church. Although 88 per cent of the sample agreed that the Church was the greatest force for good in Ireland, a striking 83 per cent of those who had completed secondary education disagreed with this proposition.⁸⁵ Biever suggested that the Irish priest faced a dilemma. An emerging educated class, as yet unrepresentative of the general population, demanded more sophisticated answers to modern-day problems than the platitudes that had satisfied their parents. But at the same time, he was confronted by the 'suspicious gaze' of the many people in rural areas 'who were hostile to change in whatever form'.⁸⁶ Change was not confined to Dublin, however. The Limerick Rural Survey, a pioneering sociological investigation commissioned by Muintir na Tíre, revealed higher personal expectations driven by the economic growth of the 1960s, the attractions of urban life and a more individualistic pursuit of fulfilment.⁸⁷

In a climate of rapid social and cultural change the extension of secondary education produced a population no longer willing to accept dictation on issues considered matters of individual conscience. This was evident in the Irish response to *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI's contested encyclical in 1968, which reaffirmed traditional Church opposition to artificial means of

83 P. McGarry, 'All Churches in Ireland in Need of "Reality Check"', *Irish Times*, 24 May 2015.

84 D. Lane, 'Vatican II: The Irish Experience', in Liam Bergin (ed.), *Faith, Word and Culture* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2004), 63.

85 B. Biever, *Religion, Culture and Values: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Motivational Factors in Native Irish and American Irish Catholicism* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 226–7.

86 *Ibid.*, 278.

87 J. Newman (ed.), *The Limerick Rural Survey, 1958–1964* (Tipperary: Muintir na Tíre, 1964).

birth control. Internationally, many Catholic theologians dissented publicly from its teaching. This occasioned a crisis of authority for the global Church. Unlike episcopal conferences in other countries, the Irish hierarchy did not issue pastoral guidelines which would have given priests some flexibility in the confessional. There were many committed Catholics who were torn between allegiance to Church teaching and marital or health responsibilities to control fertility. Many came to regard artificial contraception, no longer a taboo subject, as morally acceptable. But clerical dissent was not entertained. In Cork Father James Good was suspended from priestly duties for describing the encyclical as a 'major tragedy' that would be rejected by Catholic lay people.⁸⁸ The hierarchy misjudged the public reaction which questioned the authority of the bishops to pronounce on such a subject. Much institutional credibility was lost twenty years before the sexual scandals of the 1990s.

The quietly shifting sands of Catholic Ireland were exposed during the 1970s. *A Survey of Religious Practices, Attitudes and Beliefs in the Republic of Ireland, 1973–4*, a four-volume sociological study commissioned by the Catholic Communications Institute of Ireland, confirmed that Ireland topped the church-going charts with 90 per cent observance of weekly Mass.⁸⁹ By contrast, Mass-going in France fell by 10 per cent per annum between 1971 and 1975.⁹⁰ But numbers at Mass were not an accurate index to the spiritual health of a Church and the Irish survey disclosed a significant disparity between High Mass attendance and a rate of weekly Communion of just 28 per cent. This suggested that for some Sunday observance was a matter of social conformism or convention rather than conviction. Furthermore, the young were losing interest: 30 per cent in the 21 to 25 age category and 25 per cent of young single men and women in the 18 to 30 age bracket had abandoned the minimal obligations of weekly Mass and annual sacraments. The survey forecast that many parents of the next generation would not return to religious practice with marriage and middle age.⁹¹ The analysis of attitudes was even more disconcerting. The survey revealed a serious absence of internalised faith. Notwithstanding impressive church attendance, the survey concluded that

the beliefs and practices of the majority of Catholics are insufficiently inter-
iorised ... not personally examined and tested and then affirmed or rejected.

88 *Irish Times*, 30 July 1968; L. Fuller, 'Religion, Politics and Socio-cultural Change in Twentieth-century Ireland', *The European Legacy* 10 (2005), 50.

89 This study by Máire Nic Ghiolla Phádraig was based on a random sample of 2,600 adults. It was published by Research and Development Unit, Catholic Communications Institute of Ireland, Dublin in 1975.

90 M. P. Gallagher, 'What Good for Irish Faith?', *The Furrow* 29 (1978), 616.

91 Connolly, 'The Church in Ireland since Vatican II', 757.



36. Pope John Paul II arriving in Ireland on a visit in 1979, the first ever by a pope to the country.

Irish religious practice is sustained to an inadmissible extent by rule and law, social custom and a sense of duty, a framework of authority and sanction rather than by a personal commitment of mind and heart so that such belief or faith is extremely vulnerable in a rapidly changing society.⁹²

This prompted one priest to write of Ireland's 'spiritual malnutrition' and the danger not of unbelief but of shallow belief.⁹³

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Gallagher, 'What Hope for Irish Faith?', 608.

A survey by Mícheál Mac Gréil, SJ, of adults in Dublin in 1977 confirmed the growing gulf between the orthodox teaching of the Vatican and the beliefs of the faithful in respect of artificial contraception (63 per cent disagreed that it was always wrong), celibacy (46 per cent agreed that priests should be allowed to marry), the role of women in the church and homosexuality (43 per cent agreed that it should be decriminalised).⁹⁴ Another study found that barely more than half fully accepted belief in the devil and hell, a sign that the habitual fear of eternal damnation was waning.⁹⁵ In important aspects of Church teaching the orthodox view had become a minority one. All of the many survey findings indicated that the higher the levels of urbanisation and educational attainment, the lower the level of orthodox religious belief, acceptance of Church teaching and attendance at confession.

Against this background, the three-day papal visit in 1979 was less a celebration of Catholic Ireland than an unsuccessful attempt to slow down the inroads made by materialism and secularism. In one of the great public events in the modern history of Irish Catholicism, an estimated 2.7 million people greeted Pope John Paul II in Dublin, Drogheda, Galway and Limerick. Almost one-third of the population gathered to hear the pontiff celebrate mass in the Phoenix Park, Dublin on 29 September in an event that dwarfed the 1932 Eucharistic Congress. Nearly a quarter of a million young people greeted the Pope in Galway and heard him warn that ‘the religious and moral traditions of Ireland, the very soul of Ireland, will be challenged by temptations that spare no society in our age’ before famously declaring: ‘Young people of Ireland, I love you.’ Likewise, in Limerick he challenged his audience to choose between ‘giving excessive importance to economic growth and material possessions’ or fidelity to ‘the things of the spirit’.⁹⁶ The size of the crowds, the charisma of the pontiff, and the general excitement generated by the visit could not disguise the fact that secularisation may have been belated in Ireland but it was gathering pace.

The papal visit took place just two months after the passage of the Family Planning Act. For much of the twentieth century Ireland was unique among Western countries in not permitting abortion, contraception or divorce. The hierarchy held the traditional line on these issues, but for the first time in November 1973 openly acknowledged that the state should not be the guardian of private morality: ‘There are many things which the Catholic Church

⁹⁴ M. Mac Gréil, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland: Based on a Survey of Intergroup Attitudes of Dublin Adults and Other Sources* (Dublin: College of Industrial Relations, 1977), 411.

⁹⁵ M. Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, ‘Religion in Ireland: Preliminary Analysis’, 120.

⁹⁶ *The Pope in Ireland: Addresses and Homilies* (Dublin: Veritas, 1979), 46, 77.

holds to be morally wrong and no one has ever suggested, least of all the Church herself, that they should be prohibited by the State.⁹⁷ In Britain and America change in this sphere occurred over a century but in Ireland this was telescoped into a much shorter time span. Seven bruising ‘moral issue’ constitutional referenda on abortion and marriage were held between 1983 and 2002. They were preceded by the legalisation of contraception in 1979, as a result of a Supreme Court ruling in the McGee case, with further extensions in 1985 and 1992. The insertion of an ambiguously worded pro-life amendment in 1983 was carried by a two to one majority in a poll of only 54 per cent. In the wake of the ‘X’ case which permitted the risk of suicide by the mother as grounds for abortion, three concurrent referenda in 1992 affirmed freedoms of travel and information about abortion services but not the risk of suicide as grounds to allow an abortion. The latter position was reaffirmed in a further referendum in 2002. Garret FitzGerald recalled that concerns about property rights and pressure from the pulpit led 63 per cent to reject divorce in 1986.⁹⁸ But a significant minority dissented from Church teaching and nine years later divorce was narrowly approved. The so-called liberal agenda pursued during this tumultuous period was a reflection rather than a cause of change. As Nic Ghiolla Phádraig has noted, accompanying these campaigns was ‘a growing coolness between the government and the hierarchy’ and little prior church-state consultation, something unimaginable in earlier decades.⁹⁹

Irish Catholicism in Crisis, 1990s to the Present

Since the 1990s the religious landscape in Ireland has changed dramatically. While there is little evidence of out and out secularisation, Irish religiosity has changed significantly. Traditionally sociology of religion has been dominated by the debate around secularisation – the ‘process by which religious institutions, actions and consciousness lose their social significance’.¹⁰⁰ The secularisation thesis claims that the diminishing importance of religion in social and individual life is a consequence of an inherent tension between modernity and religion. Differences in the degree of secularisation between generations have been linked to changes brought about by increased levels of

⁹⁷ *Times*, 26 November 1973.

⁹⁸ FitzGerald, *All in a Life: An Autobiography* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1991), 631.

⁹⁹ Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, ‘The Power of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland’, 1–12.

¹⁰⁰ B. Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 149.

education, urbanisation, individualism, social mobility, greater female participation in the labour market and a decline of community.¹⁰¹ There are several versions of secularisation theory. Some emphasise abandonment of church membership; others focus on measuring traditional institutional forms of religious expression with church attendance the most widely used indicator of attachment; while a more recent approach argues in favour of the privatisation of religion. The thesis has been challenged by persistently high levels of religiosity in the United States. European churches were more likely to be 'lazy monopolies' while their American counterparts were constantly subject to aggressive competition for 'market share'.¹⁰²

Changing Religiosity

Attitudinal research reveals a divergence in Ireland between high levels of belief and declining formal religious practice. In 2008 the European Values Study (EVS) found that 92 per cent of Irish respondents believed in God, a decline of just 5 per cent since 1981.¹⁰³ Even in countries with very low participation in Church religion there was ample evidence of the durability of some form of religious orientation. For example 72 per cent in Britain expressed a belief in God in 1999.¹⁰⁴ Mac Gréil found that six of every seven Irish respondents reported some level of 'closeness to God'.¹⁰⁵ There was a high level of belief in heaven (80 per cent) and life after death (74 per cent), although both had declined by about ten per cent since 1981.¹⁰⁶ By contrast between 1974 and 2008 there was a sharp decrease in attendance at weekly mass (from 91 to 43 per cent), monthly Holy Communion (from 66 to 43 per cent) and monthly confession (from 47 to 29 per cent).¹⁰⁷ Mac Gréil's study revealed significant differences in weekly mass attendance by age cohort (19.7 per cent of 18–25-year-olds attended compared to 83.1 of those over 71), location (29.5 per cent in urban areas with a population of over 100,000 but 62.7 per cent in rural Ireland) and educational attainment (75.7 per cent of those with primary

101 V. Malesevic, 'Ireland and Neo-Secularisation Theory', *Irish Journal of Sociology* 18 (2010), 23.

102 T. Fahey, 'Religion and Prosperity', 44.

103 M. J. Breen and C. Reynolds, 'The Rise of Secularism and the Decline of Religiosity in Ireland: The Pattern of Religious Change in Europe', *The International Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Society* 1 (2011), 195–212.

104 T. Fahey, 'Is Atheism Increasing? Ireland and Europe Compared', in E. Cassidy (ed.), *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs* (Dublin: Veritas, 2002), 61.

105 M. Mac Gréil, *Pluralism & Diversity in Ireland: Prejudice and Related Issues in Early 21st Century Ireland* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2011), 462.

106 Breen and Reynolds, 'The Rise of Secularism'.

107 Mac Gréil, *Pluralism & Diversity*, 447.

education or less compared to 34.1 with third-level education). For all that, the rate of weekly Mass attendance in Ireland in 2008 was higher than other areas surveyed: Northern Ireland came a close second at just over 40 per cent while the rate in Spain was 18.6 per cent.¹⁰⁸ However, the age profile of formal religious practice suggests that decline is gathering pace. One of the most striking findings was that that confession was 'dying out', a further indication of the erosion of the Church's ideological power. According to Mac Gréil, one-third of Catholics never go to confession, only 28 per cent go 'several times a year', and just under half of 18- to 40-year-olds have given up going altogether.¹⁰⁹

While surveys help map changes in religious belief and behaviour, they do not reveal the meaning of being Catholic in contemporary Ireland. To this end, Inglis constructed a typology based on a qualitative study of contemporary Irish identities in 2003–2005 and EVS data. He proposes four types of contemporary Irish Catholic for whom personal belief and institutional belonging remain important but to varying degrees. Orthodox Catholics are loyal members of the institutional Church. Creative Catholics mix and match beliefs and practices from Catholic and other religious menus in a type of 'smorgasbord Catholicism'. Cultural Catholics identify less with the institutional Church but strongly with their Catholic heritage and tradition. They may go to mass, receive the sacraments and send their children to Catholic schools but no longer see the Church as a spiritual or moral force in their lives. Lastly, individualist Catholics identify themselves as Catholics but do not believe in some of the Church's fundamental teachings.¹¹⁰ It should be noted that the social basis of religious practice in contemporary Ireland has yet to be examined in detail.

An Altered Religious Landscape

Census data for the 20-year period from 1991 to 2011 reveals an evolving religious landscape in Ireland.¹¹¹ Four significant trends can be discerned. First, there has been a steady decrease in the share of the population who describe

¹⁰⁸ *Practice and Belief among Catholics in Northern Ireland: A Summary of Data from the International Social Science Programme Religion III (2008–9) Survey for Northern Ireland & Ireland in a Comparative Perspective.*

¹⁰⁹ Mac Gréil, *Pluralism & Diversity*, 448–9, 454.

¹¹⁰ T. Inglis, 'Catholic Identity in Contemporary Ireland: Belief and Tradition', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 22:2 (2007), 205–20.

¹¹¹ Since 1951 censuses are generally held every five years. The census planned for 2001 was postponed until April 2002 due to an outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The most recent census took place on 24 April 2011.

themselves as Catholic. The proportion was 91.6 per cent in 1991, 88.4 per cent in 2002, 86.8 per cent in 2006 and 84.2 per cent in 2011. Although the latter was the lowest proportion recorded, it was offset by population growth so that at 3.86 million the number of Catholics in 2011 was the highest since records began. In terms of nationality 92 per cent were Irish. Poles with 110,410 Catholic adherents and 49,761 UK citizens accounted for over half of all non-Irish Catholics; there were also sizeable numbers of Lithuanian (29,313) and Filipino-born (10,810) Catholics.¹¹² Despite the recent arrival of these non-Irish Catholics, Roman Catholicism had the lowest annualised growth rate of religions in Ireland between 1991 and 2011. It should be borne in mind that the census does not measure practice (unlike the Irish language) and offers no quantification of the number of lapsed members of a particular denomination.

Second, an increasing number identify as being of no religion. Between 1991 and 2011 this jumped from 66,270 to 269,811 – a fourfold increase. In 2002 this category exceeded the number of Church of Ireland adherents, traditionally the second largest religious grouping. In addition, in 2011 the religion of 72,914 individuals was not stated. Between 1991 and 2011 there was a sizeable proportionate increase in the number of atheists, which grew from 320 to 3,905, and agnostics, which increased from 823 to 3,521.¹¹³ Those with no religion or atheist or agnostic had higher levels of education than the general population and were concentrated in Dublin. In the present century there has been a visible increase in mind-body publishing, adherence to alternative spiritualities and New Age practices, as well as growing syncretism.¹¹⁴ According to Heelas and Woodhead, this represents a movement away from ‘the institutionally and doctrinally-focused religiosity of recent centuries and towards a looser and more inner-directed spirituality, less easily measured by organisational affiliation or assent to particular principles’.¹¹⁵

Third, the Church of Ireland and Presbyterian Church have made a marked demographic recovery.¹¹⁶ Since 1881 the recorded size of both denominations declined at each census. A nadir was reached in 1991 when just 89,187 Church of Ireland adherents and 13,199 Presbyterians were enumerated. But in April

¹¹² Census 2011: Profile 7, 52.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹⁴ For a useful overview, see L. Cox, ‘Current Debates: New Religion(s) in Ireland’, *Irish Journal of Sociology* 18 (2010), 100–11.

¹¹⁵ P. Heelas and L. Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford University Press, 2005) cited in *ibid.*, 102.

¹¹⁶ The census uses the category Church of Ireland (including Protestant) as distinct from Presbyterian or Methodist.

2011 there were 134,365 members of the Church of Ireland, an increase of 45,178 adherents or 51 per cent since 1991; in the same period the number of Presbyterians doubled to 24,600.¹¹⁷ Immigration played an important role in this recovery. The position of Methodists is more complex. A pattern of long-term decline was reversed between 1991 and 2002 when the number grew from 5,037 to 10,033. The increase was sustained in 2006 when 12,160 adherents were returned but fell to 6,842 in 2011. Some of the difference may be due to a change in the format of the census questionnaire. In 2011 there was no specific field for Methodist, unlike the censuses of 2002 and 2006. Some 41,161 persons described their religion simply as Christian in 2011.

Lastly, as a consequence of immigration from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, there has been a significant increase in the non-Catholic population and a growing variety of migrant religions. This has been facilitated by the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. In percentage terms the fastest growing religion has been Orthodox Christianity with an annualised growth rate of 27.4 per cent between 1991 and 2011. Orthodox Christians increased from 358 in 1991 to 20,798 in 2006 before doubling to 45,233 in 2011.¹¹⁸ Four out of five of Ireland's Orthodox Christians were non-Irish. The largest nationalities were Romanian (26 per cent) and Latvian (12.5 per cent).¹¹⁹ Orthodox Christians were mainly concentrated in Dublin and adjoining counties. The next fastest growing religion was Apostolic and Pentecostal which increased from 285 adherents in 1991 to 8,116 in 2006 and 14,043 in 2011.¹²⁰ This represents an annualised growth rate of over 21.5 per cent. Almost 64 per cent of the Apostolic and Pentecostal members lived in the greater Dublin area and over 60 per cent were of African ethnicity. African Pentecostal churches in Ireland are one of the few migrant religions to have benefitted from a book-length study.¹²¹ The largest and most widespread group is the Redeemed Christian Church of God which in 2012 had 118 parishes of various sizes in the Republic and had, with the exception of Roscommon, at least one parish in each county.¹²² Nonetheless, according to the leading scholar of African Pentecostal churches in Ireland, it is 'difficult to foresee the eventual transformation of the ghettoised universal of

¹¹⁷ Census 2011: Profile 7, 47.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 47.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 52.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 47.

¹²¹ A. Ugba, *Shades of Belonging: African Pentecostals in Twenty-First Century Ireland* (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2009).

¹²² www.irishchurches.org/members/redeemed-christian-church-of-god.

Ireland's African Pentecostals and their full integration into the majority society and culture'.¹²³

Most notably Islam has become the third largest religious group behind Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism. Ireland's Muslim community grew twelvefold from 3,875 persons in 1991 to 49,204 in April 2011 or from 0.1 per cent of the population to 1.1 per cent.¹²⁴ The majority of Muslim respondents claimed Asian (40.4 per cent) and African (21.4 per cent) ethnicity. This ethnic and denominational diversity has resulted in a variety of mosque associations and Muslim organisations in Ireland. Over half (52 per cent) of all of Ireland's Muslims were concentrated in Dublin. According to one recent study, 'as yet, Muslims in Ireland have not claimed their place in Irish society' and much will depend on how the second generation of Muslims engage with an Irish identity.¹²⁵ The Hindu population increased from 953 in 1991 to 10,688 in 2011, a tenfold increase.¹²⁶ They were largely an immigrant community with 80 per cent declaring themselves to be of Asian (other than Chinese) ethnicity. The number of Buddhists in Ireland increased from 986 in 1991 to 8,703 in 2011, of which over one-third were Irish by nationality.¹²⁷ There were 6,149 Jehovah's Witnesses in 2011, an increase of 19 per cent since 2006.¹²⁸ The Jewish religion recorded 1,984 persons in 2011, a slight increase over 2006. This religion was never numerous in Ireland and its highest recorded figure was 3,907 in 1946.¹²⁹

Italy offers a pertinent example of a shift from a monopolistic Catholic religious culture to an unprecedented level of religious pluralism.¹³⁰ The Italians no longer subscribe *en masse* to the institutional Church but retain 'a generic sense of affiliation'.¹³¹ The arrival over several decades of large numbers of immigrants transformed Italy's religious geography. Religions other than Catholicism account for 3.5 per cent of the population. This includes historically established communities such as Jews and the Protestant churches as well as the religions of immigrants. Islam has outstripped all other non-Catholic

123 A. Ugba, 'African Pentecostals in Twenty-first Century Ireland: Identity and Integration', in B. Fanning (ed.), *Immigration and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 182.

124 Census 2011: Profile 7, 47.

125 O. Scharbrodt, T. Sakaranaho, A. Hussain Khan, Y. Shanneik and V. Ibrahim, *Muslims in Ireland: Past and Present* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 217.

126 Census 2011: Profile 7, 47. For a brief overview of Hindus in Ireland, see S. Skuce, *The Faiths of Ireland* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2006), 86–109.

127 See Skuce, *Faiths of Ireland*, 110–29.

128 Census 2011: Profile 7, 47.

129 Ibid.

130 See E. Pace, 'Achilles and the Tortoise: A Society Monopolized by Catholicism Faced with an Unexpected Religious Pluralism', *Social Compass* 60 (2013), 315–31.

131 E. Pace, 'A Peculiar Pluralism', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 12 (2007), 90.

religious groups to become Italy's second religion.¹³² Ireland presents a similar pattern of uneven but concurrent secularisation and new forms of religiosity. Sociological and ethnographic research on new religions in Ireland is yet in its infancy, let alone the study of the development of a second generation of Irish citizens of Islamic, Orthodox, Pentecostal faiths.¹³³ A recent study suggests that Ireland has become post-Catholic in the sense of moving beyond 'the once-dominant monopoly of the institutional Catholic Church to a mixed religious market' with a variety of contending types of Christianity and other religions.¹³⁴

The changing religious landscape has contributed to a growing demand by parents and the state for a school system better aligned with the needs of a now culturally and religiously diverse population and a plurality of models of provision.¹³⁵ The Irish primary school system is quite unusual in the Anglophone world with 96 per cent of schools under denominational control. Some 2,841 (89.65 per cent) of the approximately 3,169 primary schools are under the patronage, management and ownership of the Catholic Church; in addition, about half of post-primary schools are under denominational control.¹³⁶ There were, in addition, 174 Church of Ireland schools, 17 Presbyterian, 1 Methodist, 1 Jewish, 1 Quaker and 2 Islamic schools. In the future there will be a wider choice of school types and less religious patronage. To this end the *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* reported in 2012 and policies to implement its recommendations are being devised.¹³⁷

Thinning Pews

A number of reasons for an increasing detachment from the institutional Church can be advanced. Atypically high participation rates may simply be

¹³² Ibid., 94.

¹³³ For a recent survey, see O. Cosgrove, L. Cox, C. Kuhling, *Ireland's New Religious Movements* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011).

¹³⁴ G. Ganiel, *Transforming post-Catholic Ireland: Religious Practice in Late Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 43.

¹³⁵ According to the 2011 census, there were 14,769 primary school children, 14,478 secondary school pupils and 4,690 children aged less than one year of no religion; 8,322 Muslim children of primary school age and a further 3,582 of secondary school age.

¹³⁶ *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Report of the Forum's Advisory Group* (April 2012), 29.

¹³⁷ Ibid; *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Progress to Date and Future Directions* (July 2014). For a discussion of the complexities involved see D. Tuohy, *Denominational Education and Politics: Ireland in a European Context* (Dublin: Veritas, 2013), 259–89; K. Kitching, 'Governing "Authentic" Religiosity? The Responsibilisation of parents beyond Religion and State in Matters of School Ethos in Ireland', *Irish Journal of Sociology* 21 (2013), 17–34.



converging with other European and Western countries, many of which went through periods of declining churchly religion. For example, Callum Brown has documented how abruptly Britain became more secular in the early 1960s.¹³⁸ Unquestionably, the number with a genuine faith commitment has shrunk. Commentators have pointed to the failure to evangelise a new generation as ‘the great drama of contemporary Irish Catholicism’.¹³⁹ Understanding of the basic tenets of Catholicism has become so poor that even in seminary training a propaedeutic year – an introductory year before formal studies begin – is being introduced because of the impoverished levels of faith development.¹⁴⁰ Second, the church in contemporary Ireland has little influence over public opinion, the state and the media. Indeed, the latter has become the chief supplier of alternative value systems and new forms of conformity. The media has also provided an intense critique of religious institutions which were once above public scrutiny. Indeed some commentators have identified a form of ‘secular fundamentalism’ in the Irish media.¹⁴¹ Investigative journalism played a major role in uncovering clerical sexual scandals and televised documentaries such as ‘Suing the Pope’ (BBC 2002) and ‘Cardinal Secrets’ (RTÉ 2002) prompted the establishment of inquiries. Marie Keenan has noted that in Ireland the coverage of clerical sexual abuse led to the emergence of a new and powerful media template: Brendan Smyth (a Norbertine order priest sentenced to twelve years imprisonment) and the paedophile priest.¹⁴² The dangers of false allegations and trial by media (sometimes without basic fact-checking) were exposed when RTÉ’s ‘Mission to Prey’ (2011) defamed an innocent Catholic priest in what the director-general of RTÉ admitted was one of the gravest editorial mistakes ever made by the broadcaster. The Irish Church has yet to develop a coherent media strategy. Third, adherence to Church teaching on social and moral matters such as abortion, pre-marital sexual relations and same-sex relations have sharply declined. The percentage of non-marital births grew from 4 per cent in 1977 to 31.4 in 2005; the number of divorced Catholics in 2011 was 64,798, a rate of 3.6 per cent (the rate for the general population was 4.2 per cent).¹⁴³ Most

¹³⁸ C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London, 2006), 5–6.

¹³⁹ Kirby, ‘The Catholic Church in Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland’, 25–6.

¹⁴⁰ J. Littleton, ‘Being a Catholic in Ireland today’, in Littleton and Maher (eds.), *Contemporary Catholicism*, 17.

¹⁴¹ D. Kiberd, ‘Ireland after *aggiornamento*’, *Studies* 101 (2012), 438.

¹⁴² M. Keenan, ‘“Them and Us”: The Clergy Child Sexual Offender as “Other”’ in T. Flannery (ed.), *Responding to the Ryan Report* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2009), 192–4.

¹⁴³ B. Hilliard, ‘Family’, in O’Sullivan (ed.), *Contemporary Ireland*, 88; Census 2011: Profile 7, 51.

spectacularly, in May 2015 a referendum on same-sex marriage was approved by 62 per cent. How people live out their Catholic identity has become, as Anderson and Lavan contend, an individual matter that consists of believing in Church teachings regarding beliefs but not obeying Church rules on how to practice this faith.¹⁴⁴ Fourth, for an increasing number, Catholicism is part of a socio-cultural identity expressed at key rites of passage such as baptism, marriage and last rites. In 1999–2000, the EVS found that over 90 per cent of the Irish population thought such religious ceremonies important. Even among the non-affiliated in other countries, there was an emphasis on a religious ceremony particularly at death.¹⁴⁵ It may become increasingly difficult to measure the extent to which church membership becomes merely nominal and religious practice a matter of social convention or cultural ritual. Lastly, the clerical sex abuse scandals and the Church's inadequate response have been intensely corrosive.

Scandal

Since the early 1990s the Catholic Church in Ireland has been besieged by scandals too numerous to itemise. The first wave of sexual scandal involved paternity cases. In 1992 Catholic Ireland was shocked to discover that Éamonn Casey, Bishop of Galway, had secretly fathered a child with an American woman, Annie Murphy, in the 1970s and used Church funds to support her. Shortly afterwards it emerged that Fr Michael Cleary, a media figure well-known for his defence of traditional Catholic values, had fathered two children with his housekeeper, Phyllis Hamilton. Both Casey and Cleary had introduced the priest in Galway in 1979. For an institution so preoccupied with questions of sexual morality the consequent loss of standing was swift. By 1999 among the Catholic European countries examined in the EVS, Ireland had on average the lowest level of trust in the Church.¹⁴⁶ Far more destructive and larger in scale due to the extensive involvement of the Church in welfare provision, as outlined by Catherine Cox (see Chapter 23 this volume), was the emotional, physical and sexual abuse of vulnerable children by a minority

¹⁴⁴ K. Anderson and A. Lavan, 'Believing in God but Not Obeying the Church: Being A Catholic in Ireland and Poland in the 1990s', in B. Hilliard and M. Nic Ghiolla Phádraig (eds.), *Changing Ireland in International Comparison* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2007), 213.

¹⁴⁵ Fahey, 'Is Atheism increasing?', 63; T. Fahey, B. Hayes and R. Sinnott, *Conflict and Consensus: A Study of Values and Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2005), 51–2.

¹⁴⁶ S. Donnelly and T. Inglis, 'The Media and the Catholic Church in Ireland: Reporting Clerical Child Sex Abuse', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25 (2010), 12.



of clergy and religious. This was revealed in a cascade of harrowing inquiry reports: Ferns (2005), Ryan (2009), Murphy (2009) and Cloyne (2011) among others. These revealed a failure of leadership, hypocrisy and a dysfunctional authoritarian institutional culture more concerned with avoiding scandal and secrecy than protecting the vulnerable. As Judge Yvonne Murphy found when investigating allegations of child sexual abuse by priests in the Dublin archdiocese between 1975 and 2004, the preoccupations of church authorities

at least until the mid-1990s, were the maintenance of secrecy, the avoidance of scandal, the protection of the reputation of the Church and the preservation of its assets. All other considerations, including the welfare of children and justice for victims, were subordinated to these priorities. The archdiocese did not implement its own Canon Law rules and did its best to avoid any application of the law of the State.¹⁴⁷

This echoed the findings of similar investigations in the archdiocese of Boston.

The betrayal of trust has undermined the credibility and moral authority of the institutional Church in Ireland and globally. The scale of clerical abuse may have appeared greater because decades of crimes were investigated in a relatively short period of time. The institutional Church does not stand indicted alone. The Irish state and society were complicit by their failure to safeguard the marginalised in the industrial school and Magdalene asylum. As in the US, the Irish Church responded by first developing child protection guidelines in 1996. This was followed five years later by the establishment of a child protection office (now the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland) and a pastoral directive on clerical child abuse in 2011 called *Towards Healing and Renewal*. The commissioning of an independent study, *Time to Listen: Confronting Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy in Ireland* (2003),¹⁴⁸ to understand the impacts of and responses to clerical child sex abuse was the first of its kind in the global Church.¹⁴⁸ The scandals have overshadowed the invaluable work of priests, religious and Catholic voluntary organisations such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul (which in 2014 had 10,500 members) to ameliorate economic hardship and social inequality.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Report by Commission of Investigation into Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin (2009), part 1, ch. 1.15.

¹⁴⁸ B. Conway, 'Religious Institutions and Sexual Scandals: A Comparative Study of Catholicism in Ireland, South Africa and the United States', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 55 (2014), 331.

¹⁴⁹ B. Lawlor and J. Dalton (eds.), *The Society of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland: 170 Years of Fighting Poverty* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2014), xx.

However, over the longer term the scandals were 'just the final act in a long play of structural transformation' which has denuded the power and influence of the Church.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Ireland is in the maelstrom of its gravest crisis in centuries. As an institution, it labours under the challenge of coping with the past and salvaging its precarious position to find a relevant role in contemporary Ireland. Catholicism is no longer an integral part of Irish identity in a society that has become increasingly heterogeneous, secular, ethnically diverse and religiously indifferent. Greatly diminished not just in membership but in authority and influence, the Irish Catholic Church could experience extreme contraction, as has occurred in France. Yet, despite Catholicism's many travails, there is still a significant critical mass of believers in Ireland. This holds the promise (and historians make at best unreliable prophets) of continued vigour within a more pluralist environment. In 1994 Grace Davie, a sociologist, advanced the concept of 'believing without belonging' which has been widely cited ever since.¹⁵¹ More recently she updated this model and prefers the concept of 'vicarious religion' where an active minority maintains the faith for the occasional use of the many.¹⁵² The resilience and size of that active minority in an Irish Catholic context depends on effective Church leadership which must do more than simply manage decline. It must ensure institutional reform, a real sharing of authority at all levels, a new evangelism, an energetic theological culture, adaptation to the spiritual demands of the present age and, above all, a rediscovery of its core Christian mission.

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¹⁵⁰ Inglis, 'Individualism and secularisation', 68.

¹⁵¹ G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁵² G. Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Sage, 2007), 143.

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