

IRISH CATHOLICISM  
A DISTINCTION BETWEEN CHURCH AND FAITH  
A THESIS  
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by  
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## Abstract

This thesis presents a history of instances of popular Irish rebellion against and co-optation of the Catholic Church along with examples of Catholic influence in “secular” society to argue for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the Republic of Ireland and the Catholic Church. The international shock following the 2015 and 2018 referenda to legalize same-sex marriage and repeal the constitutional ban on abortion, respectively, was in part a product of a tradition of scholastic discourse which relies on mass attendance and clerical participation data to draw conclusions about the state of Catholicism in Ireland. This method erases the tradition of resistance to Catholic Church mandate seen throughout Irish history and collapses allegiance to Catholicism into the act of active participation in the Church. This thesis argues for a distinction between the Church hierarchy’s mandate and allegiance to Catholicism and contextualizes recent progressive movements in an often-ignored history of activism.

“The fact is that the priests with such continuous pertinacity educated their flocks in disloyalty to the Crown, and defiance of England, that they find themselves powerless now if they attempt to preach or warn in a different sense”

-Earl Clarendon Viceroyalty, Letter to Odo Russell, 19 April 1869

“We should not forget that so much of what is cherished as good in secular society is, in fact, the fruit of Christian culture”

-Archbishop Diarmud Martin, Speech at the Iona Institute, 19 March 2015

To many, the 2015 Marriage Equality and 2018 Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> referenda seemed to be political events unfolding at bewildering speed, unprecedented testimonies of unrest between the traditional bedfellows of Irish State and Catholic Church. Both of these referenda were passed by a factor of about 2:1 (62.07% and 66.90%, respectively) and were decided in opposition to the social teaching of the Catholic Church as well as against the advisement of the Irish Catholic hierarchy. These results each made front page news around the world, and the Catholic Republic of Ireland was framed as having suddenly thrown off the yolk of her religious ties and taken an unheard-of step against her most closely associated influence. Onlookers interpreted these results as a sign of radical progressivism, the likes of which has never before been seen from the small island and a rather decisive nail in the coffin of Catholic influence on the public.

This shock and awe is due in large part to the traditional manner in which Irish nationalism and the public's relationship with the Catholic Church is understood. Irish nationalism since the 19<sup>th</sup> century is frequently collapsed (in both academic and informal circles) into an ethos which has always been in step with the Roman Catholic Church; a movement and people which are so completely rooted in Catholicism that trying to parse any discrepancies between the identities of "Irish" and "Catholic" is futile. The Irish public are described as having been so poverty-stricken and despondent during the course of the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries so as to entirely succumb to the persuasive powers of the Roman Catholic Church's instruction and offerings. Leaders like Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell are touted as champions of the Irish cause as well as dogged advocates for Catholicism, triumphs of the union between the two bodies, and exemplary of what Ireland seems to have so logically become: a polity whose basis for legibility is sourced from a guiding religious doctrine. This model locates 'Irishness' in Catholicism and conflates the two in a way which is grossly simplifying and erroneous while

failing to account for the noncanonical ways in which the Catholic faith has informed and shaped Irish identity and politics historically and contemporarily. This thesis presents an alternative standard for Catholicism's influence in Ireland and challenges the traditional discourse on Irish-Catholic identification by compiling a set of historical instances in which the Irish public rejected and reformed Roman Catholic doctrine.

The majority of discourse on Irish Catholicism and Catholic influences on Irish identity predicates itself upon the historic overwhelming majority of Catholic-identifying people in Ireland and the well-documented hegemonic power of the Catholic hierarchy over the social and moral structures in Irish society. Catholic devotion is measured in sacramental participation, mass attendance, and clerical recruitment (for examples, see Bieler 1967 and Larkin 1972). That these numbers—along with mass attendance and clerical matriculation—are in decline is commonly taken as a resounding and linear death knoll in the Church's prospects for hegemonic power over the Republic (see Conway 2011; Economist 2018; Dublin Diocese 2016; Studlar and Burns 2018; New York Times 2018).

There is no doubt that Ireland is a Catholic nation and has seen periods of intense and nearly absolute dedication to the hierarchy's teachings and institutional demands. In eras of extreme destitution and hopelessness, the Church was the bringer of education and healthcare, of a sense of community and national solidarity. Ireland took the religion as her champion in the struggle for liberation from Britain and continues to tout Catholicism as a defining feature of 'Irishness.' Today, an overwhelming majority of Irish people describe themselves as Catholic (78.3% as of 2016 (Central Statistics Office 2018)), and the clergy remain people for whom the public professes to have much respect for (Marsh 2006). However, that these statistics and those taken from historic surveys should be taken as evidence of the Church's grip on political and

social sway in Ireland is a misreading of the relationship between the two bodies. The traditional scholastic construction, which presumes the complete collapse of the Irish State and Catholic Church into one another, is not illustrative of the decidedly more complex relationship between the Irish public and Catholic doctrine, nor is the narrative which frames the recent referenda on marriage equality and access to abortion as signs of sudden progress towards a ‘new’ Ireland which is emerging from the ashes of a crumbling Church. These discourses construct a binary between faith and secularity in which deviance from Church mandate is mistaken for complete disavowal from the religion, leaving no room for lingering Irish Catholic identities which are in dynamic conversation with the contradictions between national social policy and religious morality, and whose implications for Catholic allegiance are much more complex.

To frame Catholicism as an historically all-powerful institution which swept the Irish along in their journey towards independence and from which deviance is only now being seen erases the ways in which the Irish have engaged in various modes of resistance since the inception of Catholicism on the island as well as the strains of alternative Irish identity which have existed in tandem. These include the intermingling of Irish magic practices with Catholic sacramental practices, popular resistance to strict sacramental practices, the rise of the cultural nationalist Young Irelanders movement and their popular weekly publication *The Nation*, assorted rebellions against clergy who overstep their bounds of moral imposition, and the waves of Irish feminism which have used Catholic rhetoric as a means of social and legal reform. I am not wanting to deny the undoubtedly strong and lopsided power relation between the Church and the Irish people, but argue that Irish Catholic obedience has *always* been coupled with an active relationship defined by negotiation and concession from either side. Equating ‘Irishness’ and

Catholicism does away with the efforts of centuries of Irish activists who have been “paddling like mad under the surface” (Smyth 2019), working away at reforming the Catholic institution.

The contexts from which the Marriage Equality and Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> referenda arose change entirely if one considers Ireland to be a state like this model suggests, one which has *never* entirely cooperated with Catholic demands and which has always been in a state of negotiation with the Church and the resulting expression of national identity. The referenda should be understood as the latest events in this history, the most recent outcome of popular Irish opinion defying the Catholic Church’s judgment.

In these referenda campaigns, activists trained in theology reframed Catholic epistemology and challenge the dominant interpretations from the Church’s hierarchy (*The 34<sup>th</sup>*, 2017). These referenda and their campaigns were events rooted in parsing an Irish society which can be both socially progressive *and* interlaced with Catholicism, and the outcomes demonstrate the enthusiastic receptivity amongst the Irish public to this approach to instigating reform. Even in the midst of the most dramatic dis-identifications with the Church, there has existed a commitment to retaining the parts of Catholicism which best suit the people. The referenda are thus not places of Catholic rejection; they are movements spurred by a disjointedness between what Catholicism’s meta-values claim to be and clerical application of Catholic mandate. To characterize these campaigns and their outcomes as dramatic outpourings of unfaithfulness makes invisible the degree to which faith was involved..

I propose a different metric of Irish devotion, one colored by rigorous and persistent demands upon the Catholic institution while demonstrating a continuous commitment to the values and lessons Catholicism has instilled. Continuing to center Catholic discourses reveals the persisting influence the religion has in the country; Catholicism historically has provided a meta-

narrative, a place of refuge, and a set of symbols which have proven themselves valuable and malleable to suit the Irish cause. Using the tools provided by Catholicism itself, Irish people have historically and contemporarily shaped the Church and the State, forcing the two into a union which is ever in flux and always contested. A truer measure of contemporary Catholic sway would gauge the degree to which religious symbols, language, and narrative are invoked in political and social movements.

The following is a reading of historical and contemporary publications, speeches, pamphlets, documentaries, plays, and letters for both their complaints against Catholicism and deference to it. It is an incomplete history of notable instances of active resistance to Catholic doctrine amongst the Irish public as well as the Church's responses to such demands – all in the continuous formation of the modern Irish Catholic Church and the construction of Irish identity as it is more accurately understood. The objective is not to equate the purposes or motivations of these assorted movements and campaigns, nor is it to underestimate the remarkable hegemony enjoyed by the Church in certain eras, but instead to draw together a lineage of resistance to the Church to demonstrate an Irish tradition of negotiation as well as to argue that Catholic hegemony was never inevitable and only became the most viable route for Irish independence thanks to concessions from the hierarchy and the charismatic leadership of some Catholic Irishmen. Catholicism's influence is not limited to or measured by the number of attendees at Mass or candidates for the priesthood: it is located in "secular" Irish society and political life, and should by this time be very familiar with challenges from the public.

### **Method**

Most data for this analysis were collected through interviews and primary source analysis. The interviews were conducted with professors in Political Science and Theology, with



an activist involved in the referendum campaigns on Marriage Equality and to Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment, with a community leader regarding his activism work to do with reforming the education system in Ireland, and with a Catholic sister living in Dublin. These interviews were informally conducted in the subjects' offices or homes and later faithfully transcribed and reproduced for inclusion in this project. The purpose of these interviews was to discuss their various notions of Irish identity, the state of the Catholic Church's influential power in Irish society, and the ways in which they considered the recent referenda to be important for the modern Irish state. I asked the interviewees about their perceptions regarding the referenda on same-sex marriage, abortion, and the state of the Catholic Church's control over Irish education and healthcare. While the questions varied slightly in respect to the interviewee's fields of expertise, all the interviews were to do with the historical and contemporary expressions of Catholicism in Ireland as well as their projections for the future of the faith in the country. The interviews were between 30 and 60 minutes in length. The information I drew from these interviews largely directed my reading and research and were valuable narrative additions to my understanding of the subjects at hand. Though these interviews were influential and contributed to my conception of the Irish/Catholic dynamic, I take full responsibility for any arguments represented in this paper.

Further observational data was collected while in attendance at Catholic Sunday masses in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, and Sligo. At these services, I sat amongst the other attendees, participated fully in the mass and rite of Communion, and took discrete note of my personal observations regarding the proceedings. I attended these services out of a felt need to witness the devotional actions of contemporary practicing Irish Catholics, and am very aware that my observations are limited and not constitutive of the whole of religious participation for

many Irish Catholics. As such, these experiences are largely excluded from the paper and mainly contributed to my personal thinking surrounding actuality of practicing Catholicism in Ireland, a facet of religiosity tangential to my research question but an important reminder of the day-to-day reality of faith in some Irish lives.

Additionally, transcriptions of speeches, homilies, correspondences, statements, and press releases provided data regarding the opinions of historical Irish clergy members and political leadership, and records of publications such as *The Nation* were available at the National Library of Ireland and were valuable primary source evidence. Other primary source data came from reports of the Census Statistics Office, the Trinity College Library, and public opinion survey results. These data were to do with reported numbers of Catholics in Ireland, mass attendance, economic conditions, numbers of religious in Ireland, and public opinion regarding the Irish state, Catholic Church, and clergy. Secondary source reading material was sourced from the Trinity College Library in Dublin.

This mixed methods approach was chosen in an attempt to gather information from a variety of sources both historical and contemporary. The quantitative results from censuses were supplemented with qualitative accounts from written archives, and interviews helped to clarify ambiguities in the records.

Finally, my own position in relation to this subject matter should be noted. I am an American-born white woman with distant Irish familial roots and attended Catholic schools in Portland, Oregon from age 6-18. I was raised in a Catholic parish and am confirmed in the faith but am not a practicing believer. I am well-aware of the sexual and emotional abuse from priests within the American context and have been skeptical of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution with considerable power and influence for some time. I was thus able to travel to

Ireland and phenotypically blend into the majority of the Irish population and even attend mass without attracting undue attention as an outsider. In interviews, I purposefully refrained from professing my own opinions on the Roman Catholic Church in the interest of gleaning the true opinions of the subjects.

## **Historical Evidence of Irish Departures from Catholic Mandate**

### **Early Medieval Ages: Catholicism's Incomplete Introduction**

There exist very few details about Christianity's earliest arrival to the Irish island, but most accounts place the religion's infiltration in or around the fourth century. Spread by word of mouth via Ireland's trade routes with Britain and Gaul, Christianity's encroachment was gradual, piecemeal, and informal. Nonetheless, the process of infiltration began. Palladius arrived as the first missionary and Bishop of Ireland from Rome in 431. With his arrival, presumably orchestrated by Rome to staunch the rising Pelagianism seen in Britain, "the island on which no Roman had ever set foot was now a member of Rome's spiritual empire, the Roman Catholic Church" (Bieler 1967, 7). Efforts at conversion were stymied due to the necessary importation of clergy from abroad, but where Palladius found little success, the enthusiastic British-born Patrick saw much more. The dates and details of Patrick's life and mission are decidedly contested (see Bieler 1967 for a comprehensive summary of the debates surrounding the validity of primary sources regarding Patrick's missionary work in Ireland), but most scholars believe his time as a missionary in Ireland to have been between the 430s and 460s. Patrick succeeded Palladius as Bishop of Ireland and bore out his vocation for missionary work amongst the Irish apostolate in the conversion of the pagan island. Catholicism's hold on Ireland was not complete by the time of his death, but the force of his personality and mythic lore surrounding his miracle-laden past

inspired generations of missionaries to follow, and the prevalence of Catholicism in Ireland ever since is largely attributed to his work (Bieler 1967).

Ireland's conversion, however, did not herald an era of complete observance of Roman Catholic custom; Catholic and Irish spiritual practices intermingled profoundly from the moment of Catholicism's introduction through the early modern period. While Catholicism was enthusiastically taken up after St. Patrick's mission, Catholic customs and sacramental practices were co-opted, amended, or ignored time and again in their struggle for supremacy over the older magic practices. Patrick himself, though convinced it was his calling to save the Irish from their pagan ways and bring them to accordance with Christianity's mandate, found most success by way of compromise with the existing spiritual traditions. According to folklore, he used the metaphor of the shamrock to teach the people about the Holy Trinity and the Celtic Cross, a cruciform combined with a circle to represent the sun, became popular as gravestones and symbols of devotion.

In St. Patrick's wake, Irish Christian identification increased and eventually came to represent the huge majority of Irish people, but that did not necessarily incur a decrease in the beliefs which had existed prior. Carroll (1995) argues that most scholarship on this era works from a "survivalist" framework which positions pagan and magic rituals as oppositional, tenuous practices which were lucky to survive as long as they did in the shadow of the looming Catholic behemoth. Carroll argues that this emphasis on their demise overlooks the ways in which Irish paganism was *rejuvenated* alongside Catholicism's introduction. Devotions made to holy wells, for example, are an ancient Irish faith ritual, but "many wells first become holy only *after* the Reformation...[and] other wells first became the focus of cultic activity as recently as the early nineteenth century" (355). At these holy wells, devotees would engage in 'rounding,' a pagan

ritual involving walking a certain number of times around the well, “while very consciously and explicitly [associating] the supernatural power available there with beings recognized as saints in the official Catholic tradition” (360). As sites which served as places to appeal to spirits for healing and protection as well as priest-assigned places of penance, wells regularly saw devotees pray the Our Father or Hail Mary while completing the much-older Irish rounding ritual.

Pagan practices’ persisting popularity (as opposed to their dying throes) is recorded from the medieval period up through the early modern. In seventeenth-century Ireland, the practices of sprinkling Holy Water on property and belongings, wearing charmed amulets inscribed with biblical verse, and anointing one another with “Christ’s Blood” to ward off harm were common and the English astronomer James Camden recorded the common practice of kneeling before full moons and reciting the Lord’s Prayer (Thomas 1971). While the Church did not condemn these acts as long as they were done with sincere Christian intent, they did contribute to an environment in which the “distinction between religion and magic is an impossibly fine one” (Thomas 1971, 30). Irish priests were reportedly more lenient than the hierarchy, but evidence shows that most Catholic leaders tolerated and even incorporated these magic practices into their own ritual, assigning rounds for penance or blessing Holy Water for use on troubled farm land. They condemned the “licentious and unruly” behavior which was at times seen at these rituals, but otherwise demonstrated a plasticity which goes oft overlooked in modern scholarship (Carroll 1995, 361).

Thomas (1971) quotes seventeenth-century cleric Jeremy Taylor’s report on the Catholic Irish peasantry that they could:

give no account of their religion what it is: only they believe as their priest bids them, and go to mass which they understand not, and reckon their beads to tell the number and the tale of their prayers, and abstain from eggs and flesh in Lent, and visit St. Patrick’s well, and leave pins and ribbons, yarn or thread in their holy wells,

and pray to God, S. Mary and S. Patrick, S. Columbanus and S. Bridget, and desire to be buried with S. Francis cord about them, and to fast on Saturdays in honor of our Lady. (76)

His mentioning the Christian practices of attending mass and respecting clerical advice in the same breath as the Old Irish of visiting holy wells and adorning them with blessed tokens summarizes the point nicely: Christianity's introduction to Ireland was an additive to pre-existing magic rituals rather than the source of their demise.

This co-optation of ritual goes both ways, as Christian practices were altered when they arrived in Ireland as well. Irish and British Christianity, in this early medieval period, defied and altered Roman Christian practices to such an extent that some scholars coined the term "Celtic Christianity," an organization separate from Roman Christianity and not under papal control. Modern scholarship has since rejected this construction for lack of evidence that a conscious, distinct entity was ever realized, but it is true that the Christianity practiced in Ireland and Britain at this time was substantially different from that in much of the rest of the Roman world. To begin with, the Irish resolutely continued to date Easter using the Julian Calendar, though Rome had by this point transitioned to the use of the Victorian Cycle (Corning 2006). Also, the practice of tonsuring (shaving) the heads of monks and clergy was an important mode of distinction between the laity and holy men. Roman tonsure proscribed a shaved circle at the top of the head, leaving a ring of hair to symbolize Christ's crown of thorns. In Ireland and Britain, however, tonsure is described as being shaved from ear to ear, a stylistic discrepancy which often drew outrage from Roman onlookers (Corning 2006). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Irish Christians developed a method of private penance. Traditionally, this sacrament was a public one: penitents wore special robes at mass and engaged in a

general confession in front of the congregation. The Irish model was so popular that it had been almost uniformly adopted throughout the Christian world by 1215 (Corning 2006).

Even Irish reverence to their priests had its limits. Though Taylor reported a strong sense of loyalty to local clergy, their mandates were at times ignored for the sake of a lay cause, like that of resistance to British rule. The Church, for example, had a strict ban on the existence of secret societies, yet the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries gave rise to the Whiteboys, Defenders, and Ribbonmen, groups of rural Irishmen committed to resisting British colonization. These organizations were secret but not insignificant. Ribbonism had “many thousands of its members at its height” (Garvin 2005, 45). Though these groups were not expressly founded upon anti-clerical sentiment, they are notable examples of the reasons for which popular rural support might be rallied against the hierarchy’s wishes: in the pursuit of Irish liberation and advancement.

This section is meant to challenge the popularly-imagined vision of a wild Ireland which succumbed to its civilizing saviors with docility and obedience, condemning their ancient faith practices to a slow-yet-assured death. Catholic domination was never truly complete: the institution underwent an enculturation in which the Irish “[took] up the language of the colonizer and [made] it their own” and during which metamorphized versions of Christian and magic rituals flourished (Erickson 2019). To understand Catholicism’s usurpation in this period means doing away with the ideas of, as Carroll puts it, “discrete boundaries and nonoverlapping memberships” (1995, 364). Catholicism did not conquer the Irish people and quash their centuries of belief practices, nor did Catholicism remain unchanged by its entry. Instead, the two morphed to become a popular Catholicism which was “characterized by a logic that was

internally consistent but quite different from the logic associated with official Catholicism” (352). There has never been a time in which Catholic dictate has reigned supreme and unchallenged by local modification. Of course, any institution which enters a foreign population should expect amendments, and the Christian world is replete with examples of different cultural interpretations of the Roman religion. However, I argue that Ireland’s interpretations and co-optations remain significant to include for the variety and nature of these alterations: this was an era in which the Church incorporated pagan magic practices into their rituals, bent on matters like Easter and penance, and allowed Christianity’s name to be invoked in magic rituals. Ireland was never a part of the Roman Empire, and it should be noted from the beginning just how different Christianity looked in Ireland from the outset.

### **Old Ireland versus Young Irish**

Daniel O’Connell is perhaps the most well-known and publicly-lauded historical figure in Irish history. Born in Cahersiveen, County Kerry in 1775, he grew up in the era of the Penal Code and Protestant Ascendancy, legal and brutal discrimination against Catholics by the British. The anti-Catholicism enshrined in their constitution denied Catholics the ability to own land, be educated, and involve themselves in political life entirely. Though 75 percent of the Irish were Catholic, they were taxed to support the Protestant Church of England, and practicing Catholicism could earn the death penalty for all involved. O’Connell’s family was wealthy enough to send him abroad for school, and he returned with a conviction to liberate and empower the dispirited Irish peasantry. By all accounts, O’Connell was the first to recognize that the Catholic Church was a potential instrument of energizing an Irish sense of national unity.

In 1813, a plan for Catholic Emancipation was proposed which would repeal British restrictions on Catholics in exchange for power over Vatican decree. O’Connell seized this



opportunity to condemn the deal and shame the Church into allegiance with the national cause, encouraging the bishops to see Irish Catholicism “as the religion of the embattled community” (Garvin 2005, 54) and their place in leading this movement a strategic boon. Priests were often a commonly-respected and obeyed figure in Irish villages, and under O’Connell’s influence, “every Catholic priest in Ireland became a unit of agitation and every priest a recruiting and propaganda agent for the movement” (McCaffrey 1968, 25). While it was the British who had originally taken up religion as a mode of oppression, O’Connell translated Catholic theory into a practical means of resistance, “molding millions of illiterate Irish peasants into an organized and articulate national opinion” (6). He is thus credited with the invention of modern Irish nationalism. O’Connell’s charisma and political genius carried him to a career in the House of Commons, where he worked as a statesman for enfranchisement, land rights, and education for the Catholic Irish.

By the early 1840s, O’Connell began work towards repeal for Ireland and established the Loyal National Repeal Association. Despite his best efforts, however, he managed to attract a measly 10 members to his first rally (McCaffrey 1968). This disappointing turnout was the first in a prolonged drought of responsiveness from the public. Whether due to his age, or to his persisting loyalty to the reluctantly-radical Catholic hierarchy, the lull was not due to a lack of nationalist zeal among the public. There did emerge, at this time, a more successful outlet for radical mobilization. In 1842, Thomas Osborne Davis, John Blake Dillon, and Charles Gavan Duffy began a weekly newspaper called *The Nation*, an anti-British, pro-Irish-heritage publication which aimed to establish a cultural nationalist movement emphasizing agrarian pride and working class values. The first edition of *The Nation* was published in Dublin on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1842 and the included ‘Letter to Subscribers’ reads, in part:

there are, in truth, but two parties in Ireland: those who suffer from her National degradation, and those who profit by it. To a country like ours, all other distinctions are unimportant...The object of the writers of this journal is to organize the greater and better of these parties...For this National party in Ireland we believe it indispensable to its usefulness to claim, now and always, the right to stand at the head of all combined movements of Reformers in this country. (Duffy, 8)

The publication was unreservedly pro-Irish as opposed to pro-Catholic, a distinction which had of course existed previously but which had gone unexpressed thanks to O’Connell’s using the latter to express the former. Whereas O’Connell had expressed doubts about Irish nationalism’s ability to generate a coherent movement without the super-structure which Catholicism lent it, the Young Irelanders demonstrated more faith in Irish pride’s robustness. The three co-founders were in their 20s at the time and were dubbed the “Young Irelanders,” conveniently and implicitly pinning “Old Ireland” on O’Connell. In fact, on the same page as the quoted passage, they include an announcement that the editors are commissioning portraits of “distinguished Irishmen, living and dead.” O’Connell is among the list of their five first picks, at once an homage to his influence and a gesture towards his relegation to bygone history-making. From its very onset, *The Nation* had the largest subscription base ever seen in Ireland: upwards of 8,000 people bought the paper every week and many more heard its message as it was commonly read aloud at pubs and marketplaces across the country.

The Young Irelanders’ claim to leadership in the nationalist movement was quite obviously at odds with O’Connell’s, and the two parties frequently clashed. Both sides recognized the risk of alienating the other’s public base, but their tenuous truce ended by 1864 when O’Connell levelled the grave charges of ‘secularist’ and ‘anti-clerical’ against the popular movement and *The Nation*’s editors publicly walked out of a meeting when O’Connell argued that force would never be an appropriate option in the negotiation for Irish independence.

Just as this feud was nearing the point of no-return and the Young Irelanders movement was gaining considerable national traction, three harvests failed in rapid succession from 1845 to 1848. An estimated million and a half people perished and another million and a half emigrated. While the effects of the Great Famine which ensued are more deeply discussed in the following section, it is important here to examine its effect on the trajectory of the Young Irelanders movement which was, essentially, to stop it in its tracks. While *The Nation* was published until 1897, the support for a cultural nationalist movement lost much of its momentum due, largely, to Catholicism's greater capacity for generating infrastructure and organization. As will be discussed later, the Church provided social welfare services like healthcare and education as well as coherent social structure to Irish society in ways which Irish cultural practices and organizations could not, and it became apparent that the struggling Irish people were looking for solace and comfort from conservative sources rather than continuing to charge on in radical ways. The Young Irelanders, though popular and charismatic, were not, however, prepared for catastrophe" (Miller 1975, 87), and the Famine exposed the new movement's weaknesses. Catholic-based national identity assumed the stronger hold at this juncture because it "functioned to help [the Irish] deal with the new source of stress, the threat of rootlessness" (Miller 1975, 93) more adequately than *The Nation* was able to.

This section demonstrates that Catholicism being the route to national mobilization was not inevitable, especially in the years before the Great Famine. The Church had been taken up by O'Connell, a man of enough political skill and charisma to effectively mold the spirits of the Irish people under a common comradely cause. O'Connell, however, had only used the Church because, thanks to the anti-Catholic roots of British nationalism, it was the institution most able to capture Irish revolutionary spirit. This pairing was not entirely suitable for either side.

Scholars slip allusions to the unrest between the “reluctant” Catholic Church and the masses they “imperfectly” permeated in their reports of the era, glossing over a bond whose cracks are infrequently centered in historical discourse (Garvin 2005, 14; Larkin 1975, 1248).

While Garvin (2005) has characterized the pairing of nationalism and Catholicism as “unwittingly derived” (13), I argue that the match was more consciously made than not. It was O’Connell’s political persuasiveness which helped convince the two sides that their alliance would be mutually beneficial, earning him the title of “Liberator” and a fond and enthusiastic network of public support. O’Connell no doubt did a great service for Ireland, crafting a nationalism which “emerged...as a badge of dignity and a promise of hope for a people who in the century before had lost these human qualities” (McCaffrey 1968, 2), but once the beginnings of national identity had taken root, there is considerable evidence that a movement which valued Irish and Gaelic heritages was more energizing to the public. The Young Irelanders articulated this spirit with *The Nation*, whose huge circulation is evidence of an underground national zeal which cared less about religious differences than it did about the commonness of being Irish, for, as has already been argued, the emphasis on Catholicism had risen from resentment towards the English in the first place. Had the Famine not struck when it did, perhaps the Young Irelanders’ movement would have found more lasting success, but the disaster played into the Church’s hands quite nicely: they found themselves with a reduced congregation which their previously overtaxed infrastructure and clerical population could more easily support. Still, *The Nation* was a powerful display of how quickly the Church could lose its grip as the banner under which the

people would rally, and forced the institution to reluctantly radicalize on the behalf of Irish independence, support for which was a condition of popular goodwill.<sup>1</sup>

### **The “Devotional Revolution”: Emmet Larkin and the Great Famine**

Emmet Larkin’s contributions to academic and popular notions of Irish Catholicism are monumental. He fostered the academic tradition of assuming Irish obedience to Catholic dictate and framed the societal collapse which accompanied the Great Famine as the point at which Ireland more totally became a “Catholic” people. It is this presumption—that the Irish were at one point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a completely obedient people to the Church’s suggestion—which has provided the basis for other scholars to frame recent rejections of Catholic doctrine as fundamentally un-Irish and unprecedented disavowals. However, the mass attendance and priesthood matriculation rises in this period which Larkin uses to support this characterization do not, as Cara Delay argued in 2004, constitute proof of such a docile people.

In the years before the Great Irish Famine, the Irish working class was subsisting primarily on potatoes, a crop which thrived in Irish soils and which was able to grow without the help of much improvement upon the land. Investing in a single crop, of course, exacerbates the effects of a bad harvest, and in 1845 a virus suspected to have been introduced from North America led to the collapse of four years’ worth of crops (McCaffrey 1968). This period led to the death of between 1 and 2 million Irish people and the emigration of 1.5 million more. Relief from Britain was not to be found: the social services available to the Irish were limited to the English Poor Law of 1838, which provided a lower tax rate and workhouses for indoor housing

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<sup>1</sup> This attitudinal shift is also due to Cardinal Cullen’s disillusion with the English Parliament for stalling on Catholic-only education as well as O’Connell’s exposing the deal Britain had wanted to strike with the Vatican involving funding for the seminary in Maynooth in return for their avowed condemnation of nationalist uprisings. See Norman 1956 and McCaffrey 1968, respectively, for more details on these events.

relief, but which in practice jailed the travelling minstrels who brought news and entertainment to the countryside and was too expensive to be supported by the rest of the country (McCaffrey 1968; Norman 1965).

Emmet Larkin was amongst the first to explore the effects of the Famine on religiosity of this era and he argues that, morbidly, the Catholic Church profited immensely from the famine. Larkin coined the term for the period from 1850-75 the “Devotional Revolution,” a time in which “the Church had managed to build itself into the very vitals of the nation by becoming almost one with its identity” (Larkin 1975, 1244). This was a period, Larkin argues, which heralded the onset of a devout, sacramentally-driven Irish public and cemented the role of the priest as revered social leader amongst the laity. The Famine brought to a head the century of Irish cultural loss which had preceded it, and Catholicism was “economically and organizationally...ready to meet their religious and emotional needs” (Larkin 1972, 639). Larkin argues that they sought a replacement for their bygone cultural heritage in Catholicism and readily accepted the “new symbolic language” that the hierarchy proffered (Larkin 1972, 649).

Larkin posits his claims on the rise in regular mass attendance (from 40% to 70% from the 1830s to 1870s (Hynes 1989, 47)) and the dramatic influx of religious (Ireland had 1,000 nuns and 1,250 priests in 1840 and 3,700 nuns and 3,200 priests by 1870 (Larkin 1972, 644)). The jump in clerical participation made itself felt to a greater degree due to the devastation from the Famine: the ratio of priests to Catholic laity in Ireland nearly doubled. The early nineteenth century had seen “the great mass of the Irish people become practicing Catholics,” but a shortage of clergy and pew benches made accommodating all of those who would otherwise attend regular mass impossible (Larkin 1972, 625). The famine’s effect was hence two-fold: it

generated a greater need for Catholicism as well as made it possible for the Church to deliver. A perfect storm for Irish piety to flourish.

Cara Delay sees a different picture. In her research of the diaries, correspondences, and visitation reports of late nineteenth-century priests and bishops, she finds evidence that “there seems not to have been a clear and specific turning point from disorganization to uniformity or from religious indifference to devotion” (2004, 52) and argues against Larkin’s conception of a sudden and complete “revolution.” Delay’s research presents a more complicated devotional reality, in which, rather than fall gratefully into the clergy’s open arms, the Irish working class “adapted religion to suit their own needs” (57). Though mass attendance may have been high, priests report low confession attendance, failure to receive communion, and poor knowledge of the catechism and various sacramental rites amongst the laity. Additionally, they tended to continue the older practices of fairy belief and magic rituals in tandem with their halting adoption of Catholic custom. Priests of the time write of the general notion that “many Catholics...viewed sacramental changes as unnecessary and traumatic invasions” (51) and “rarely hesitated to complain about their clergy when priests attempted to change long-standing customs” (54), behavior which is a far cry from Larkin’s rosy picture of obedient flocks.

As for the rise in clerical enrollment, this may have in part had to do with the lavish lifestyles enjoyed by many priests. Many Irish people were living hand-to-mouth subsistence lifestyles, and the respect and fortunes which befell priests were undoubtedly attractive. In the midst of the Famine, Carlow priest James Maher reported to Paul Cullen (later the Archbishop of Dublin):

The best Catholic house in each Parish and the best style of living appears to be the Priests. Time was when both parties were more upon an equality. The demands of the Priests on the People have greatly multiplied and the laity are beginning to complain. Dues, dues is the perpetual cry, and the constant Sunday theme of some.

The Alter is occupied for an hour every Sunday, for the transactions of the Priests and oats and turf, and all the arrears of Baptisms and unctions. What a desecration! ... The people of some parts of Connaught, have combined to resist the payment of dues to the Priest, unless according to a scale which they themselves devised. This is a bad sign of the times. The movement however at present is nearly hushed, but I fear it will again break out. (Maher to Cullen, Feb, 21, 1843. *Paul Cullen Papers*, Archives of the Irish College: Rome (as cited in Larkin 1966, 859))

Some Irish priests were taking advantage of the dues system and extorting their congregations and, as Maher reports, these demands were often not taken lying down. This priestly practice “damaged the character of the clergy exceedingly” (Maher to Cullen, Jan. 2, 1842, *Paul Cullen Papers*, Archives of the Irish College: Rome (as cited in Larkin 1966, 864)) and the laity is reported several times to have engaged in revolts against their local priests. These reports throw the characterization of this time as one during which “a more puritanical, socially disciplined, anglicized and thrift social culture” blossomed seriously into doubt (Garvin 2005, 63).

This complicating evidence does not refute the simple fact that the nineteenth century saw a huge rise in Catholic identification. Delay concedes that Irish people did in fact overwhelmingly consider themselves to be practicing Catholics (2004), but she also argues that “new devotions did not immediately or completely overtake older traditions and customs” (56-7). The Catholicism which arose was a “hybrid sort of religion” which drew from Rome and Irish custom and within which “Catholic ritual and vernacular practices continuously interacted and intertwined” (43; 56). Larkin’s characterization of this epoch as one in which the Irish abandoned completely their spiritual heritage does not account for this intermingling, nor does it consider that the dictatorial flow may have come from the bottom up. Delay presents us with a history of Irish laity who “molded” their religious lives to suit their own purposes, often “reworking reworking the dictates of their bishops and priests and, at times... frustrating the Church’s mission” in doing so (50). The late nineteenth century was not the stage for complete



cultural disavowal and adoption, and the direction of influence during this “Devotional Revolution” must be understood accordingly as a two-way street.

### **The 1890s: Parnell’s Demise and the Irish Hero**

Irish politician Charles Stewart Parnell, the ‘uncrowned King’ of Ireland, took over from Isaac Butt in the parliamentary struggle for Irish Home Rule in the late 1800s. He was elected to the House of Commons in 1875 and, in the footsteps of O’Connell, quickly recognized that “Irish Protestants as a group would not embrace Home Rule and that nationalism must be grounded on the enthusiasm of the Catholic masses and the dollars of Irish-Americans” (McCaffrey 1968, 111). Parnell, a Catholic himself, emphasized the Catholicism of the Irish in opposition to British Protestantism (much to Irish Protestant’s dismay), and was successful in stirring Irish nationalist aspirations in the pursuit of the right to Home Rule. His political instincts proved to be effective when combined with his aggressive personality, and by 1885 he had established an alliance between the Irish Party and the British Liberal Party, the most powerful allegiance that the British Parliament had seen and a move which forced the ‘Irish question’ to the fore. In Parnell’s shadow, the clergy and other local nationalism movements found their influence weakened, as public devotion was increasingly won by Parnell (Garvin 2005). However, Parnell’s fortune turned sour when his extra-marital affair and subsequent divorce became public. The scandal prompted Liberal Party leader, and longtime Parnell-ally, William Gladstone to call for Parnell’s resignation as leader of the Irish Party. Parnell did not resign without a fight; he accused his fellow members of being traitors, refused Gladstone’s calls, and surrendered any future for continuing in the Party thanks to his belligerence. He left political life in sudden disgrace and died in October of 1891.

Ironically felled by a Catholic moral code, Parnell left a leadership vacuum in his wake. Nugent (2008) argues that Parnell's demise was also the symbolic fall of the Irish patriarch, the de facto keeper of national masculinity. From the ashes of one hero arose competing pillars for the public's symbolic aspirations: the Church versus a number of culturally-Irish groups which advocated an alternative means of heroics. The contest between these bodies never fully ended, and should perhaps not be conceptualized as one in which the positions of the two bodies were distinct.

In Parnell's wake, the Church lost a leader who had doggedly emphasized Catholicism's utility for the Irish cause. His death destabilized this public devotion and left the hearts of the Irish polity available to be won over. In response, the Catholic hierarchy shifted its devotional focus to the ancient Celtic warrior-priest Colmcill as the saint to be most lauded (Nugent 2008). Colmcill was a sixth-century priest who had been banished from the priesthood for fighting against King Diarmuid, and lived out the rest of his days on the Scottish isle of Iona. He is most notable for his physical strength and masculine bravado, tempered by a distinctly-Catholic mastery over his own desires and bodily temptations.

Brute strength interlaced with moral self-denial colored non-Catholic discourses on the ideal Irish man as well. In the 1890s,

there began to emerge in piecemeal fashion a growing number of small, diverse, and articulate groups who began to argue that the deeper needs of the nation were not being met by the dominant political consensus. In cumulative fashion they insisted...that the real task was nation building and that it could only be accomplished by the nation recovering its primeval identity, which was still rooted in what was left of its ancient Gaelic heritage. What actually took place, then, was a revival of cultural nationalism generally described as the Irish-Ireland movement. (Larkin 1975, 1266)

These groups included the Gaelic Athletic Association (or GAA, which banned official practices of English sports like cricket and promoted the ancient Irish ones of hurling,

hammer throwing, running, and wrestling), the Gaelic League (dedicated to de-Anglicizing popular literature by circulating Irish-authored and Irish-language works), and a literary revival centered in Dublin which made the city a hub for theatrical and literary production (McCaffrey 1968). The GAA, obviously a central outlet for physical masculine dominance, was not solely a realm of bodily strength. Instead, Nugent argues that the rules of the games, the spirit in which they were practiced, and the league's intention to promote a "combination of spiritual and material properties delicately balanced in a harmonious synchrony not given but attained," aimed to develop a more comprehensively dominant man instead (2008, 603). The Gaelic League and other literary and theatrical movements, which might be assumed to emphasize masculinity's ties with spiritual and mental prowess, demonstrated a more dynamic understanding of manliness as well. Artists revered the connectedness to the land of ancient Ireland and revered the "tillers of the soil" and other physical laborers as vital connections to her spiritual and folk tradition (McCaffrey 1968, 139).

The ideal Irish man was emphasized by all parties to be one devoted to mastery of his mind, spirit, and body; strength on all these fronts was the mark of a hero. Signaled by the rise in both the Church's social capital as well as the huge numbers of GAA members and Irish literary enthusiasts, the Irish demonstrated their commitment to incorporating spirituality in their symbolic leadership aspirations. The Church's mandate for self-restraint and mastery was echoed by the GAA, just as the GAA's cultivation of physically powerful bodies was seen in the priesthood's devotion to St. Colmcill and the onset of "muscular Christianity" (Nugent 2008, 603). Parnell's death forced an era of reckoning on Ireland, a time in which the public had to identify its values without the aid of a perfect model. Parnell's fatal flaw had been his moral

recklessness, and his fall from grace in the Catholic ethical standards of the time was swift and decisive. Ireland was most devoted to ‘The Chief,’ but no one was above this metric of acceptability. True, this era was a time in which the Church struggled to regain control over the tide of national sentiment, but even in non-Catholic organizations, their moral dictate reigned supreme and was loyally adhered to.

### **Peggy McCarthy: Mother, Martyr**

In 1946, 25-year-old Peggy McCarthy became pregnant out of wedlock. She was from the small Irish town of Listowel, one of ten siblings, and living at home with her parents. Though certainly not celebrated, her pregnancy was tolerated by her parents, and when Peggy went into labor on February 10, she was attended in her home by her mother and a midwife. However, serious complications soon arose, and the family called close friend John Guerin to take Peggy in his hackney to the local hospital, just a mile away.

Peggy was turned away at the door. The nuns who ran the hospital cited Catholic and government regulations, which dictated Catholic hospitals turn away all unwed mothers seeking medical attention. The nun suggested they try for the hospital in Tralee, 20 miles away and a 40-to-50-minute hackney ride over unfinished roads. St. Catherine’s Hospital in Tralee redirected John and Peggy once more, suggesting the hospital in Killarney, 20 miles further still and, derisively, labelled a “more suitable place for her equals” (RTÉ 2018, 11:39). Either en route to Killarney or shortly after her arrival, Peggy delivered baby girl Breda and died.

John Guerin, livid at the treatment Peggy had received, returned to Listowel with Peggy’s “martyred remains” (RTÉ 2018, 16:03) and the infant in tow. He arrived to deliver the body to the town’s parish to be prepared for a Catholic mass and burial, only to find the gates of the Church and convent chapel locked against him. The priest, Canon Patrick Brennan, had ordered

that Peggy was not to be buried on consecrated ground due to her sins against the faith. This was tantamount to “locking the gates of heaven” (RTÉ 2018, 16:45), damning Peggy’s immortal soul.

The events which next transpired should be put in context to be fully understood. Rural Ireland in 1946 consisted of villages in which the local priest was “the top dog...totally feared” (RTÉ 2018, 3:15). Very few people had any education past primary schooling, and there wasn’t much option besides obeying the dictates of the priest and the schoolmaster (which were often one and the same, because “the people were terrified of the priests and the schoolmaster, and the schoolmaster was terrified of the priest” (RTÉ 2018, 2:55)). As such, Catholic moral code permeated every facet of society, beginning with school and including healthcare. Every hospital aside from the county hospitals (of which Killarney was one) was Catholic, and the care given at these places “had a moral ideology underpinning it” (RTÉ 2018, 15:40). Hospitals were funded by county councils, which were closely monitored by the Church hierarchy. Healthcare was a reserved right for the pious amongst the flock and would have been doled out “along Catholic social policies, which were quite strict” (RTÉ 2018, 14:28).

It was in this environment that John Guerin and several other villagers broke down the Church’s front gate. They stormed the Church and demanded a Catholic wake and burial from Canon Brennan, who eventually conceded a wake in the local chapel at the hospital which initially turned Peggy away as well as a burial on consecrated ground. That Guerin and others would have found the considerable courage necessary to stand up in such a way to Church authority is remarkable in and of itself, considering the degree of control Brennan would have enjoyed. Their actions reveal two nearly contradictory motivations.

The first is the deep and abiding sense of what Tom Garvin has called “cultural solidarity” (2005, 8) – the threat of condemnation from the hierarchy waned because “this was

one of their own” (RTÉ 2018, 19:13). Guerin and others could simply not abide by the disservice done to one of their fellow townspeople, regardless of the condemnation from the Vatican which might befall them. They are described as reverting to “pagan Ireland” (RTÉ 2018, 19:20) for Peggy’s sake, a determined band of working class farmers of whom the clergy had asked too much.

The other notable, and nearly paradoxical, motivation is that this “pagan” mob was driven by their determination that a Catholic burial was something worth fighting for. So incensed was Guerin about the prospect of Peggy’s exclusion from consecrated ground that he was prepared to organize a rebellion against the holiest man in the town: his faithfulness is the *cause* of the revolt. This dichotomy is notable and not unfamiliar: the Catholic faith had been understood and revered by the Irish partially for its teachings on forgiveness, acceptance, and redemption. When the clergy refuse to emulate those values, it is the laity who will challenge them for Catholicism’s sake.

At instances of challenge such as this, which were admittedly very rare and carried out only in the effort to “get around the very strict rules of the Church” (RTÉ 2018, 25:06), the Church hierarchy tends to soften their stance (as seen in altering the sacrament of penance during the medieval period, ceding to the demands of resistant congregations during collections, and in Catholic radicalization in the face of alternative expressions of Irish nationalism like the Young Irelanders movement). In the case of Peggy McCarthy, Canon Brennan was present at her burial in the Church grounds and the Bishops of the region never retaliated in any way against those involved in the uprising (RTÉ 2018). Today’s priest at Listowel, Father Martin Hegarty, recently apologized about Canon Brennan’s decision that day: “Canon Brennan at the time...made the

wrong decision. There was no need to close the Church doors...He regretted it afterwards and even apologized for his decision at the gravesite” (RTÉ 2018, 24:34).

RTÉ Radio 1 released a documentary on Peggy McCarthy’s plight in August 2018, sparking popular condemnation of her treatment and widespread praise of Guerin’s actions, but it was not the first tribute to McCarthy’s legacy. Her brother Sean McCarthy wrote a ballad in her memory called “In Shame, Love, In Shame” and John Guerin’s son Tony Guerin wrote a full-length unpublished play called “Solo Run.” All three of these renderings have taken the offensive tack against the Church while invoking biblical imagery in Peggy’s defense. She is a “martyr,” a “dead mother, Catholic, local” in Guerin’s “Solo Run” (RTÉ 2018). Her fate is the “cross we must carry,” and McCarthy wishes for “the water to baptise (*sic*)” his sister in her eternal life and for the proclamation that the “meek will inherit...and...small children will come unto Me” to be realized for Peggy (2010).

What at first appears to be a radical moment of rebellion is complicated and better understood in the recognition that these actors cursed Catholic doctrine for McCarthy’s fate and simultaneously reified their commitment to the religion as a matter of paramount importance: “Label it whatever way you will, but Listowel is making a stand for the Christian burial of an unmarried mother” (RTÉ 2018, citing Guerin’s unpublished “Solo Run”).

## Marriage Equality, Baptism Ban Repeal, Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>: The Latest Chapter in Context

- 1972**—Ireland enters the EU by referendum. Passed with 83.1% of the vote; Special relationship with the Church removed from Irish constitution by referendum with 84.4% of the vote
- 1973**—*Roe v Wade* US Supreme Court decision legalizes abortion; *McGee v Attorney General* Supreme Court decision rules in favor of protecting access to birth control due to marital privacy rights
- 1980**—Clerical abuse accusations begin to surface en masse
- 1983**—Referendum to amend the constitution to include the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment, enshrining the equal rights of the unborn, passes with 66.9% of the vote
- 1986**—Referendum to repeal constitutional ban on divorce defeated with 63.5% of the vote
- 1990**—Mary Robinson elected president of the Republic of Ireland
- 1992**—Referendum to remove risk of suicide as acceptable reason for abortion defeated with 65.4% of the vote; Right to travel abroad for abortion passed by referendum with 62.4%; Right to information about abortion and birth control services passed by referendum with 59.9%
- 1996**—Referendum to relax ban on divorce and allow it within regulations passed with 50.3%
- 1998**—Good Friday Agreement ends conflict with Northern Ireland
- 2002**—Referendum to remove risk of suicide as acceptable reason for abortion defeated with 50.4% of the vote
- 2015**—Marriage Equality referendum legalizing same-sex marriage passed with 62.1% of the vote; Referendum on expanding children’s rights passed with 58% of the vote; Repeal of Rule 68 from the National School Handbook, which gave religion classes a privileged position in public schools
- 2017**—‘Baptism Barrier’ removed from majority of public schools
- 2018**—Referendum to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment passes with 66.4% of the vote; Pope Francis visits Dublin and speaks at Phoenix Park while protests are staged at the Garden of Remembrance; Referendum to remove blasphemy as a punishable offense from the constitution passed with 64.9% of the vote



The preceding section was an incomplete collection of some moments in Irish history which elucidate the discrepancy between public will and Catholic mandate as well as demonstrate some instances in which Catholicism was co-opted to suit popular will in defiance of clerical decree. These sections were included for the purpose of de-emphasizing the recent referenda on same-sex marriage and abortion and the removal of the “baptism barrier” from the National School Handbook as isolated incidents of rebellion. Though outside the scope of this paper, it is important to briefly note the huge developments of the twentieth century for Irish life—such as entrance into the European Union, progressive reproductive policy developments in the United States, the public and preventable deaths of pregnant Irishwomen Ann Lovett and Savita Halipanavar, and revelations of widespread clerical sexual abuse and the Church’s attempts at suppressing these scandals—all of which have contributed to an environment of mistrust and have provided a platform to begin publicly calling Church policy into question at the national scale.

When viewed in the historical context I have presented, these events are not nearly as shocking or bewildering as they are commonly portrayed: they are the products of centuries of incremental posturing on the behalf of the Irish people against certain pillars of the Catholic Church, a body to which they are *simultaneously* partially allied. These recent referenda and activist movements should be understood in a more accurate and comprehensive context which allows for a relationship between the Irish public and Catholic Church which is colored both by struggle against religious doctrine and loyalty to Catholic values.

### **Marriage Equality**

Article 41 of the Irish Constitution identifies the “Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and

imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law” and follows with the promise: “The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack” (Article 41.1.1; 41.3.1).

This “attack” came in the form of lesbian couple Ann Louise Gilligan and Katherine Zappone. After both attaining degrees in Theology and marrying in Canada, the couple moved to Gilligan’s native Ireland and applied for tax status as a married couple. They were denied by the Revenue Office, which cited that marriage is a right reserved for heterosexual couples, thus excluding Gilligan and Zappone from the legal, fiscal, and civil rights marriage imbues. The couple decided to bring their case to court, and, over the course of a decade, their efforts morphed into Marriage Equality, the activism group led by Grainne Healy and, later, Brian Sheehan. This group contended with Zappone-Gilligan losing their court case, competing campaigns for the right to homosexual civil partnership, and the moral history of a country which had only de-criminalized homosexuality in 1993. By spring of 2015, however, they had gathered enough momentum and legal backing to bring a referendum which would constitutionally permit same-sex marriage to the Irish public.

The task ahead was no small chore. Research has demonstrated that “the electorate is thought to be more conservative in referendums, at least those dealing with social and moral issues” (Ranney 1981, 10) than in party or candidate elections, and that polity have a tendency to support the status quo by voting conservatively on “life-style, moral, and racial issues” (Magleby 1984, 191), homosexual marriage undoubtedly falling into this category. The Catholic Church has long made it clear that marriage is a sacrament reserved for a ‘man’ and a ‘woman,’ and that non-conforming sexual and romantic partnerships are considered perversions and dilutions of the entire institution. The Church has an abiding interest in preserving a conservative definition of

marriage as well. As the State defined the 'Family' as the fundamental unit of Society, so is the Family the fundamental unit of faith. It is largely through familial lines that religious practices are passed down, and Archbishop Diarmud Martin voiced the Church's interest in a speech three days before the referendum, saying, "The sacrament of marriage is a sacrament given for the building up of the Church" (Martin 2015).

It is in this environment that the Marriage Equality campaign began their work, continuing in the tradition of the Irish feminist movement with "a willingness...to use state machinery, especially the legal process to achieve radical change" (Smyth 1993, 249). The campaign began in earnest in March 2015 when Marriage Equality and Grainne Healy agreed to partner with the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network's Brian Sheehan, burying the hatchet of the groups' divide on the matter of attaining legal civil partnership before marriage. They knew from the outset that they "could never ask people to choose between their faith and marriage equality" (*The 34<sup>th</sup>* 2017, 22:03). Calling for an out-and-out rebuke of the Catholic faith would not be successful; there is, however, a large proportion of people receptive to criticism of the hierarchy (Parker 2017, 15). The campaign exploited this schism by a number of means, mainly by way of emphasizing the community aspect of the matter at hand. They focused on personal narratives from locals rather than celebrity confessions, and entered debates with attitudes of patient explanation to combat the "dogmatic and perceived intolerance from the No side" (14). When the Archbishop of Armagh came out with an unexpectedly resolute warning that "to interfere with the traditional definition of marriage was not a simple or trivial thing" on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the campaign responded with competing testimonies from priests and other religious figures who supported the referendum (14; 15).

Marriage Equality were also helped by the unexpected personal testimonies from public figures who knitted their Catholic upbringing with their support for the referendum. Among them were Tom Curran, the Fine Gael general secretary, who wrote an unsolicited piece for the *Irish Independent* in April. In it, he called himself a “card-carrying, practicing Catholic who attended Mass every Sunday and practiced his faith daily” and called upon the readers to consider voting yes (Parker 2017, 15). A month later (and a week before the vote), on May 15 longtime television reporter Ursula Halligan wrote for *The Irish Times*: “As a person of faith and a Catholic, I believe a Yes vote is the most Christian thing to do. I believe the glory of God is the human being fully alive and that this includes people who are gay” (Halligan 2015). Halligan’s article acknowledges and lays bare the scare tactics used so long by the Church to inculcate a strong sense of disgust and aversion towards homosexuality, and then invites the readers to relieve themselves of such notions, to shed the damaging impact of the hierarchy while retaining the love which the faith is supposed to imbue. Both of these tributes were hugely impactful in bringing about support from the voting bloc of older people, many of whom were Catholic and many of whom were reassured by the meshing of Catholic identity and support for change.

The campaign’s tone is perhaps best colored by one of their most popular slogans: “I’m Voting Yes, Ask Me Why.” While the opposition campaign tried its best to raise alarm about denigration to the institution of marriage and to how children of homosexual couples might be affected, the yes campaign took a gentler tack. They acknowledged the dissonance between their goal and the dictates from the hierarchy, and demonstrated a path by which Catholicism was not in discord with the proposition. The inviting, missionary tone this slogan implies beckoned rather than intimidated, and was ultimately successful.

The referendum, on whether to include a 34<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution, which states: “Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex” (Article 41.4), was ratified with 62.1% of the vote on May 22, 2015. The overwhelming margin by which Marriage Equality won is a testament to Irish receptivity to support expressions of Catholic faith quite different from that which the hierarchy would prefer. *The Economist* reported that, in this campaign, “overt Catholicism has all but vanished from the scene” (2018), but I think that is a mischaracterization of the two sides’ techniques. The demands of Catholic leadership made themselves well-heard, but the missionary work of the Equality campaign, which deliberately pulled on the Catholic heartstrings of the Irish Catholic moderates, was more successful. Theirs was a campaign in which Catholicism was everywhere; just not where the Church would have liked it.

### **EQUATE and the Baptism Barrier**

Remnants from nineteenth-century Cardinal Cullen’s insistence upon the importance of Catholic-only education for the shaping of Ireland’s young Catholic minds lingered on in Irish public schools until 2017. The role of primary and secondary education in indoctrinating young people into the Catholic faith was (and is) vital. The Church has long been an enthusiastic proponent of teaching religious doctrine in schools and has worked diligently to ensure the privileged place Catholicism has within classroom walls. The Church’s status was enshrined in national policy via several avenues, namely with Rule 68 in the National School Handbook which gives religions classes a privileged status in national schools, and with the standard admission policy which gives privileged admission status to children who have been baptized in the Catholic faith, colloquially referred to as the ‘Baptism Barrier.’ These rules applied to all

national public schools, about 90% of which are Catholic, meaning some counties have only one non-Catholic option and some none at all.

Michael Barron founded EQUATE in October 2015 with the goal of expanding access to primary and secondary schools by way of removing the Baptism Barrier and de-centering Catholicism's privileged status. His background as an activist with BeLonG To, a group working for the betterment of homeless LGBTQ+ people, as well as with the Marriage Equality campaign, lent the organization some early credibility, and EQUATE entered the debate on education with a board of experienced activists, education professionals, and various stakeholders with ties to children's rights and religious interests.

Knowing that they were taking on one of the bastions of Catholic control left in Ireland, the EQUATE campaign had to be very delicate in its approach. Parents who would otherwise support EQUATE's goals were understandably anxious to endanger their child's chance at admission to school, and there was worry that outing themselves as in support of more diverse admissions policies would do just that. The other danger to EQUATE's success was being painted as being anti-religion (Barron 2019). Groups like Atheist Ireland were committed to pinning the labels of "anti-Catholic" and "anti-religion" on EQUATE's mission, and Barron recalls this initiative as the biggest impediment to their progress (reminiscent of O'Connell's attempts at secular-smearing the Young Irelander's *The Nation* for its inclusion of all Irish voices, regardless of creed).

Nonetheless, EQUATE ran a campaign which confronted religion in terms of freedom of creed and belief, and which, "instead of being anti-religion, [was] pro-religion in many ways" (Barron 2019). The group was immediately successful with the highly-publicized repeal of Rule 68 in October 2015, and the commitment from former Minister for Education and Skills Richard

Burton to end the Baptism Barrier in Catholic national schools beginning in the 2019-2020 school year. The success had here demonstrates receptivity to appeals to equality of access and freedom of expression, qualities which, as the EQUATE campaign worked so hard to point out, are less about dismissing Catholics than about improving educational prospects for young Irish people.

### **Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>**

Ailbhe Smyth was deeply involved in leading the Marriage Equality campaign in 2015, and when I interviewed her in her home in Dublin this winter, she told me that, on the day the vote was counted and the celebrations were beginning for Marriage Equality, she started passing out leaflets for Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>.

The Catholic Church's position on abortion is unwavering. Catholic doctrine prohibits abortion under all circumstances, considering it murder to interfere in the development of an embryo once fertilization has occurred. In 1983, in the midst of an era of conservative reaction to worldwide recession and the United States' *Roe v Wade* decision, the Church and lay religious groups worked to ratify the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the constitution. The amendment acknowledged the right to life of unborn fetuses and guaranteed them equal protection under the law as the woman involved, effectively banning the practice of abortion except in extreme danger to the mother's life. It was passed by a margin of about 2:1 in a national referendum. Since the amendment, in the wakes of several public tragedies and scandals including the deaths of Ann Lovett and Savita Halappanavar, referendums have allowed for the right of women to travel abroad to obtain an abortion, the right to information about abortive services, and the re-affirmation of the risk of suicide as a legitimate danger to the mother's life and grounds for

abortion. However, the Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> campaign was the first to work in earnest towards repealing the entire amendment and instituting more lenient abortion policy in Ireland.

The campaign's task was complicated by two facets of the referendum itself. The first being that, "when people are asked to answer a question, one half of which is positive and the other half is negative, and when to give a negative answer looks like peering into the abyss of uncertainty, the people will choose the certainty" (Ranney 1981, 13). Being a question of repeal without replace, the Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> campaign was especially susceptible to this sort of phenomenon. Moderate voters who would prefer some reform on abortion policy but are wary of a spiraling devolution without a backstop will frequently reach the conclusion, 'why take a chance?' (Mueller 1966, 60). In fact, to win, the anti-reform campaign "need only to create doubt...they do not need to convince the electorate of all their points" (60). The many particularities of abortion regulation are certainly liable points upon which the antis might exaggerate their opponents' claims and imbue doubt in the voter. Secondly, "policies concerned with birth, sex, and/or death...are particularly susceptible to becoming politicized as morality issues" (Studlar and Burns 2015, 274). There is no avoiding the fact that debates on abortion are so often brimming with emotion and vitriol, and that the Church has for so long condemned the act as one of murder.

In cases like these, researchers estimate that the pro-reform campaign needs to outspend the antis by a factor of three—there is so much political power behind a seedling of doubt that the pros must be able to entirely overwhelm it with reassurance upon reassurance (Mueller 1966). Additionally, "when the pros predominate over but do not overwhelm the anti campaign, when the campaigns are equal, and when the antis predominate – in any of these circumstances the antis will win" (64-5). By this metric, the Repeal campaign's prospects looked dismal: Smyth



estimates the “No” campaign had close to three times as much funding as the Repeal campaign’s crowd-funded million euros.

Repeal did have some early positive indicators, however. On the first day they opened their crowd-funding platform, they met their week’s funding goal by lunch. They met their month’s goal by that evening. By national regulation, referendum campaigns cannot receive any international funding, so this outpouring of support demonstrated from the very beginning an enthusiasm from some of the Irish public who had been waiting on this moment for so long. Additionally, though “No” had close to three times as much money, the funds were dispersed amongst fragmented and competing interest groups, putting the campaign’s coherence far behind the swift public relations moves from Repeal.

From the onset, Smyth emphasized, “this is not about lambasting the Catholic Church; it’s saying women have needs which the state must attend to...moderate Ireland said ‘We agree with that’” (2019). As with EQUATE’s campaign, repeal was careful to point out that theirs was not a movement hell-bent on taking down the Church, but on situating religion more squarely in the private realm and allowing for more choice in the public realm. One of the campaign’s most prominent slogans, “Sometimes a Private Matter Needs Public Support” sums it up: this was not a movement aiming to bring abortion out into the open and do away with the privacy involved, it was about asking for community support to bring public values into the private realm.

The Catholic hierarchy, while not formally involved in the opposition’s campaign, was supported by many lay groups and individually from many pulpits. Smyth supposes that the Church viewed this decision as “a big one not just for Ireland, but across the Catholic world, because if Ireland fell, who was going to be safe?” (2019). That is certainly the tone adopted by some Catholic leaders who, having recently lost ground on marriage and in education, were

counting on this as an opportunity to stall the political momentum of the moment. Archbishop Diarmud Martin wrote on March 9, 2018 in a press release entitled “Catholic Teaching of the Dignity of Human Life and Regarding Abortion”: “I ask all Priests over the coming weeks to draw attention, in an appropriate way, to some basic principles of Catholic teaching concerning the dignity of human life and regarding abortion.” He was calling on Catholic loyalties to bend once more to clerical advice, and when, on May 27<sup>th</sup> 2018, 66.4% of the public voted to repeal, it was apparent the call had gone unanswered.

World news treated this outcome as a completely un-foreseen outcome, a shocking and complete throwing-off of Catholic influence in Ireland for an unknown sociopolitical identity (the New York Times’ headline the next day read: “Where Did Ireland Go?” as though this result did not reflect the will of the majority of the Irish public and was instead the act of a wild band of non-Church-goers who had managed to wrest control from this purely-pious and imaginary nation). Implications for the role of the Church’s influence will be considered later, but I would like to argue here that, as with Marriage Equality and EQUATE, Catholicism had not vanished from the scene. The Repeal campaign knew that asking for denial of Catholic mandate was a stone too far, and instead framed the decision as one which was a matter of helping a neighbor to a better situation. They placed Catholicism in the same box as the right to abortion, in that both were made to be private matters and should be within a citizen’s rights to exercise, without infringement on the public.

### **Discussion**

It is significant that the grounds upon these most recent battles are being waged are largely on those of gender, sexuality, and bodily agency. In the same way that Catholic identity became important to the Irish because Protestant identity was made important by the British, so

have the subjects of reproductive rights and matrimony come to the forefront of clashes with the Church precisely because the Church has time and again emphasized their conservative resolve on such matters. The resulting political landscape is one in which “sexual identity and national identity are mutually dependent” (Meaney, 230), which is to say that because Catholicism has had such a heavy influence on the salience of Irish national identity, Catholic precepts to do with reproductive and family structure autonomy become inflated to the extent of being constitutive of Irish moral code. With the advent of increased rates of secondary and tertiary education and the liberalizing force of modernization in recent decades, Irish feminist movements have been working to “complicate and change Irish culture at precisely that point of intersection [between womanhood and Irishness]” (Meaney, 243).

Irish feminism, of course, does not exist in a vacuum and is not the only movement struggling under the yoke of a religion whose role is both spiritual and national. Brenner (2011) writes about an era in Indonesia in which “moral discourses of gender and sexuality have been used by both liberal and conservative Muslims to support differing visions of Indonesia’s future as a just and democratic nation” (479). She studied a recent period in Indonesian political history in which a conservative Islamic movement converged with a feminist democratization movement centered on human rights, and found that, despite their different histories and motivations, the movements have “intersecting moral discourses” when it comes to issues on gender and sexuality (478). She summarizes the feminist movements’ tactics as such:

members of a young generation of liberal Muslim activists were insisting on the need to address women’s problems and social injustice more generally within an Islamic framework. Convinced that Islam is a religion based on justice, and that the Qur’an affirms the equality of all believers...a relatively small but dedicated group of activists worked to overcome what they saw as the patriarchal tendencies of Islam that had developed in the course of its transmission...Many felt that the original spirit of the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings and the wisdom of the Qur’an had been corrupted by generations of interpreters whose cultural biases had led

them to assert male superiority and the need for women to be controlled by men. Activists argued that it was high time to reexamine the corpus of Islamic writings for the cultural baggage they smuggled in the name of religion and to not always look to the letter but, rather, to the spirit of the Qur'an to understand how it should be interpreted and applied in the context of modern society, using a hermeneutic approach. (481)

The techniques by which these are being discussed are reminiscent of Audre Lorde's 1984 argument, that using the "master's tools" to "temporarily beat him at his own game" is effective in the short term but ultimately unable to "dismantle the master's house" (112). Feminist movements in Ireland and Indonesia are working against dominant narratives regarding how religion should influence social life, but their applications of Catholic and Islamic rhetoric reifies the religions' relevance and demonstrate a robust commitment seeing them "linked in a critical discourse that aims to bring about a transition to a more just society" (Brenner 2011, 482). As such, in Ireland, where the specter of the rampant abuse and dishonesty from the Catholic hierarchy has spoiled the Church's reputation in many minds, declining trends in mass participation and clerical matriculation and substantial critiques of Catholic policy must not be mistaken for a parallel distancing from the Catholic faith.

Traditional discourse is satisfied with interpreting trends in allegiance to the Church as indicative of changes in Irish religiosity. In doing so, scholarship commits two errors. Firstly, it often ignores the unrest in Irish congregations by equating mass attendance with piety (as Emmet Larkin does repeatedly in his 1972 work) and drops in mass attendance or priesthood recruitment with weakness in Catholic faith. True, vocations to the priesthood have been declining since the 1950s (Conway 2011), but those numbers disregard the possibility that those who do choose the priesthood in this political and social culture "may well be the most committed of any generation" (65). Secondly, assigning the strength and relevance of the Catholic Church to trends in participation has resulted in a glut of sweeping characterizations which simplify and

homogenize Ireland to a point of caricature and erase traces of counterculture or mainstream resistance. For example, Maguire's statement on mid-twentieth-century Ireland: "Most people accepted without question the church's interference in all aspects of their lives and bowed to the dictates of the local priest" (2001, 354). This statement counsels against the search for instances of resistance, as in the case of Peggy McCarthy.

Archbishop of Dublin Diarmud Martin counselled: "Numbers alone do not tell the whole story" (2017a). Scholars must locate for the *many* manifestations of religion to generate a more accurate representation of Catholic sway in Ireland. These alternative markers include everything from medieval Catholic inclusion in magic rituals to invoking Peggy McCarthy's martyrdom as a convincing cause for rebellion. Parnell's fall from grace due to a distinctly-Catholic moral faux pas demonstrated the power of Catholic social code, while an emphasis on spiritual development in the athletes of the GAA exposes a religious devotion in a group whose names may not have otherwise been registered amongst the church-going devotees. Contemporarily, perhaps it was not what Archbishop Martin had in mind when he argued that "Irish society is still permeated with elements of faith" (2017b), but Dr. Erickson of Trinity College cited the two largest drag shows in Dublin which take place at The George (an historic gay bar) on Christmas and Easter as tangible elements of Catholicism's varied influence in modern society (2019).

These Catholic traces and transformations are ignored by most scholarship in their attempts to measure the Catholic-ness of modern and historic Ireland. Today's religious landscape is not fully told by the plummeting mass attendance and priesthood participation statistics; accounting for Catholic "secular theology," religiosity expressed outside the Church's walls and for which Catholic social teaching has provided a "backdrop," reveals an Ireland in which secularity is not nearly as linear (Erickson 2019).

These sorts of Catholic expressions, while promising for the continued influence of the faith, do not necessarily translate to positive trends for the Church. Ireland, for the Roman Catholic Church, is a “reservoir of and defender of spiritual values in a materialistic world” (Hynes 1989, 63). Ireland’s renown as a deeply and proudly Catholic state is at once a boon for Catholicism’s influence in Europe and also a potential source of weakness should the Church in Ireland be rejected (as Ailbhe Smyth put it: “If Ireland fell, who would be safe?” (2019)). The threat of publicly losing control over a supposed safeguard of Catholic values would greatly weaken the Church’s international reputation and security. This potential has historically forced the Church’s hand towards moderation and compromise with some liberal and nationalist goals. Celtic rituals and traditions crept into early Catholic sacraments; Catholic spokesperson Cardinal Cullen came out in support of Irish independence where he had previously opposed such a radical route; Canon Brennan allowed Peggy McCarthy to be buried on consecrated ground after local outrage. These instances can be interpreted as strategic compromises to a public upon whose goodwill the Church is ultimately reliant.

Today, public opinion towards the Church is colored by resentment, grief, and mistrust regarding the widespread clerical abuse and Church-sanctioned cover-ups which followed.<sup>2</sup> Instances of compromise for the sake of survival were seen in the Association of Catholic Priest’s statement in the weeks before the referendum to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>: “We do not wish to tell anyone how they should vote” (ACP 2018). Adopting a passive role in Irish political life was not uniformly accepted by the Catholic hierarchy, but there is certainly a benefit to refraining from being a roadblock to a movement which was expected to curry public favor. Sr. Somers of the St.

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<sup>2</sup> See Marie Keenan’s book *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power and Organizational Culture* (2012, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York) for a comprehensive history of these events.

Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin predicted similar movements towards more liberal stances in the future: she expects the Church will allow priests to marry and have families in the next few decades, and that official stances on contraception will continue to soften (2019). The Catholic Church, which has contributed so much to Irish society, also has a lot at stake in continued acceptance from the public. Measured compromises will continue to be a part of the future of this storied relationship.

### **Conclusion**

Those who would bemoan the recent referenda as marking the end of an era of the Catholic Church's rule in Irish life would perhaps be correct. Church decrees and hierarchical opinions no longer wield the clout they used to, thanks in large part to a confluence of global secularization as well as to increasing levels of education amongst the Irish public and the continued scandals of clerical abuse which are being revealed. However, by means of what I consider to be an imperative distinction between the Catholic Church and the Catholic faith, the former's decline does not necessarily imply the latter's. As Delay exposed in her reading of the "Devotional Revolution" of the later nineteenth century, high mass attendance rates do not necessarily correlate with high levels of unfettered Catholic practice, just as lower levels of mass attendance and clerical matriculation today have not borne out a non-Catholic society. For the majority of the laity, historical ties to the Church may be fraying, but cultural responsiveness to Catholic teaching, values, and discourse is not fading in tandem. Conflating Catholicism's presence in the Republic of Ireland with the hierarchy's capacity for popular political agitation is as simplistic as it is erroneous.

The hundred-year anniversary of Irish independence is upon us. Ireland is in the process of "hammering out her national myths," as Dr. Erickson put it, and the Catholic Church may

indeed continue to fade from the limelight of mainstream society. However, the impacts left on one another will not: Roman Catholic practices of confession, dating of Easter, roots in nature, and acceptance of certain Celtic spiritual rituals have all stemmed from bottom-up influence from the Irish masses and, similarly, Catholicism has an informal but pervasive hand in the value system and moral code of Irish society. Lessons learned by generations of mass-goers are being enshrined in law in a manner which the Church certainly did not intend, but whose Catholic roots cannot be denied. Ideas about helping the less fortunate, offering love to one's neighbors, and refraining from casting judgment have emerged as popularly-endorsed notions, a most recent step in the distinctly-Irish history of adapting the Catholic faith to suit their needs.

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Profiles of Those Interviewed**

#### Michael Barron

Michael Barron is an activist and academic working in Ireland. He is the founder of BeLong To, a group working to improve the lives of LGBT young people experiencing homelessness, and EQUATE, an activism group which worked, successfully, to remove the baptism requirement from admission to Irish public schools as well as to allow for more religious diversity in the system itself. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D.

#### Dr. Jacob Erickson

Dr. Erickson is an assistant professor of Theology at Trinity College, Dublin. He has previously taught at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN, and his most recent publications include "Toxic Creativity, Deep Time, and Moral Pleasure: An Ecospirituality of Technology" and "Whispering Forests, Sacred Groves: Welcome to Night Vale's Abominable New Animism."



### Dr. Eoin O'Malley

Dr. O'Malley is an associate professor in the Dublin City University School of Law & Government. His research is mainly to do with Irish politics, specifically on the positions of the Taoiseach and the cabinet. He wrote a textbook, *Contemporary Ireland*, in 2011, and has authored over 40 articles.

### Ailbhe Smyth

Ailbhe Smyth is a feminist and lesbian activist and scholar living in Dublin. She was among the top leadership in organizing the campaigns for Marriage Equality's 2015 referendum as well as the 2018 Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> referendum. She wrote the introduction for *Irish Women's Studies Reader* (1993), a board member of the Equality and Rights Alliance, and the former Chair of the National LGBT Federation. She received a lifetime achievement award at the Galas 2015, Ireland's LGBT Awards Ceremony.

### Sr. Patricia Somers

Sr. Somers is a sister with the Religious Sisters of Charity. She joined religious life in 1960 and earned her nursing degree shortly after. She has worked in Nigeria and Ireland as a midwife and prison chaplain, and now serves at the St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin.

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