

# Irish Catholic Chaplains in the First World War.

by  
John Martin Brennan.

Student Number. 0770178

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## Introduction

On August 4<sup>th</sup> 1914, when Britain went to war, the proportion of her forces that were Irish born was approximately 8.7%. Of those, the majority were Catholic. Fitzpatrick argues that 68.1% of primary reserves mobilised in 1914, in Ireland, were Catholic and that they were overrepresented in every province.<sup>1</sup> The number of Irish born in the army had, in fact, decreased in the previous century from a high of 42.2% in 1830 to 12.9% in 1898.<sup>2</sup> The main reason for this decline was more than likely the Famine (1845-48) and the consequent fall in population mainly in the South and West of the country, which were traditionally important recruiting areas. In a 'plea for the Peasant' written in 1878, Sir William Butler, an Irish Catholic officer, claimed that hunger and eviction were forcing the best of the peasants to emigrate instead of enlisting..... 'the breeding ground of that old army, the clachan and cabin had been broken into and all but destroyed'.<sup>3</sup> This assessment was supported by Cardinal Logue when speaking under different circumstances in 1901 when recruits were being sought for the Boer War.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Fitzpatrick, 'Logic of Collective Sacrifice, Ireland and the British Army, 1914-18', *Historical Journal*, 38, 1995, pp. 1017-1030 at p. 1017

<sup>2</sup> E. M. Spiers, 'Army Organisation and Society', in T. Bartlett and K. Jeffries (Eds), *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 337.

<sup>3</sup> T. Denman, 'The Red Livery of Shame,' *Irish Historical Studies*, 14, 1994, pp. 208-233 at p. 209.

[The authorities] were warned by far-seeing men from time to time of the mistake they were making in driving into other lands the hands that make the wealth and the heads that design, driving away those who would be the strength of the Empire when assailed, getting rid of them in order to get rid of a little trouble... They might come to Ireland now for men and men were not to be got.'<sup>4</sup>

Other factors, too, worked against the recruitment of Irishmen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Denman quotes an officer in Tullamore in the 1860's who claimed that 'Romish priests have set their face against recruitment'.<sup>5</sup> This was in connection with a rumour that the 'wives and children of Irish Soldiers were struck off all pay and allowances unless the parents consented to send their children to Protestant schools'. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were disputes involving Catholic priests and the military authorities in the Curragh camp in Kildare. In 1824 a row between Major Arbuthnot of the 36<sup>th</sup> Regiment and the local parish priest was over the same issue. Fr. Gerald Doyle was concerned that the children of the garrison, who were mainly Roman Catholic and recruited in Ireland, who attended the regimental school in the barracks were obliged 'to hear a Protestant Minister, to read texts and prayers not of their own persuasion and that they were marched on Sunday to a Protestant church, and detained there during the service'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> J. Aan de Wiel, *The Catholic Church in Ireland 1914-1918* (Dublin, 2003), p.9.

<sup>5</sup> Denman, 'Red Livery of Shame', p. 210.

<sup>6</sup> C. Costello, *A Most Delightful Station* (Cork, 1996), p. 120.

Denman argues that throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Irish Nationalist leaders, beginning with O'Connell, had opposed recruitment.<sup>7</sup> He further points out that the recruit himself was never criticised and newspapers like *The Nation* had championed the cause of Irish troops in the Crimea, claiming that Catholic chaplains were denied access to soldiers.<sup>8</sup> During the Boer war, anti-recruiting efforts became a more important part of Nationalist activity. Nationalist groups such as the Irish Transvaal Committee, formed by Maud Gonne and Arthur Griffith made great efforts to halt or, at least, disrupt recruitment through meetings and poster campaigns. Denman quotes a police report from Armagh in 1900, suggesting there was cooperation between the IRB and the Ancient Order of Hibernians with regard to anti- recruiting campaigns. He further quotes Carson as saying 'his Majesty's soldiers are forbidden to walk through the streets [of Dublin] for fear of offending the tender susceptibilities of Boer sympathisers'.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the truth of that remark, support for Sean McBride (a fighter on the Boer side against Britain) in a subsequent election was negligible. Nationalist Ireland in the end supported the Irish party. The Irish party's attitude towards recruiting and the Boer War was far from clear. Several Irish MP's were former soldiers or militiamen, yet there was hostility towards the war. If there was little real opposition to recruitment in the House of Commons, William Redmond was removed in October 1899 for his 'refusal to restrain his language in support of Kruger and the Boers'.<sup>10</sup> Outside the House, several Irish MP's actively discouraged recruitment. In 1899 Swift McNeill 'advised the people not to enlist under the British flag

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<sup>7</sup>Denman, 'Red Livery of Shame', p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>10</sup> T. Denman, 'Voice from A Lonely Grave', *Irish Sword*, 73, 1992, pp. 286-297 at p. 287.

while in April 1900 James Gilhooley said ‘no Irishman should help do England’s ‘dirty work’ by enlisting’.<sup>11</sup>

The attitudes of some Catholic priests were also anti-recruitment. Fr. P E. Kavenagh wrote a pamphlet entitled *England’s Robber War* in which he stated that every man ‘who engaged in such a war, if he dies in it must suffer the loss of his soul’.<sup>12</sup> As the anti-recruiting campaign gathered pace after the war, a priest in Castleblaney in November 1905 declared that ‘Irishmen joining the army contracted vicious and drunken habits and if they are not shot, they return to their country to fill the jails and workhouses’; in the same year, Canon McFadden of Glenties made ‘a very violent’ anti-recruitment speech.<sup>13</sup> Patrick Callan claims that in 1907 there was a campaign to discourage Catholics from joining the Navy and that the Bishop of Cork refused to bless the colours of the Royal Munster Fusiliers because they were previously ‘blessed by a Protestant’.<sup>14</sup>

There was opposition to the army for other reasons too. Soldiers were considered to be immoral. Archbishop Walsh complained about soldiers ‘being allowed to congregate in any particular thoroughfare, especially at night.’<sup>15</sup> In 1848 a priest worried about the morals of a young woman in the neighbourhood of Adare where he perceived ‘outrages

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<sup>11</sup> Denman, ‘Red Livery of Shame’, p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>14</sup> P. Callan, ‘Ambivalence towards the Saxon Shilling’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 41, 1986, pp. 99-114 at p.100.

<sup>15</sup> Aan de Weil, *Catholic Church in Ireland*, p. 8.



[were] committed on decency' and morality by the local soldiers.<sup>16</sup> In 1881 there was much bad feeling noted in the town of Ennistymon against troops 'walking out' with local girls. Herbert Compton, in his memoir of life as a hussar in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, believed that relationships between soldiers and local Irish girls were very rare: 'The girl I left behind me never existed on the line of march, for if Bidy or Kathleen were once seen talking to a Saxon soldier she was "for it" next time she went to confession'.<sup>17</sup> Con Costello quotes a soldier telling of his father's opposition to his enlisting 'that his son should be a soldier was a disgrace to the family.....more than that he would see me in my grave and he would certainly never see me in his house again'. John Lucy explained that he and his brother joined up having had a row with their father and having been responsible for the burning down of a boarding house.<sup>18</sup>

The reputation of the soldier was poor. In 1888 it was estimated that 60% were illiterate or barely literate.<sup>19</sup> As noted earlier, Archbishop Walsh was concerned about soldiers congregating in Dublin streets. This was undoubtedly a fear of encouraging prostitution. Prostitution and venereal disease had been problems associated with the army throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, of course, much earlier. In the Curragh camp in Co. Kildare there was an ongoing battle to remove prostitutes known as 'wrens'. These women lived in flimsy shelters of gorse or furze and lived very difficult lives. They seem to have been regularly attacked and beaten by priests. Costello gives examples of this at

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<sup>16</sup> M. Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society 1800-1940* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 170.

<sup>17</sup> H. Crompton, *Kings Hussar* (London, 1893), p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> J.F. Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum*, (Eastbourne, 1992), p.14.

<sup>19</sup> Costello, *Most Delightful Station*, p. 147.

Newbridge in 1845 and Tempelmore in 1855.<sup>20</sup> He also notes that in 1856 and 1857 38-38.6% of diseases effecting troops at the Curragh, were venereal.<sup>21</sup> Dublin as a garrison city and one of the poorest in Europe had a serious prostitution problem. So too did other garrison towns in Ireland. Costello mentions Cahir, Limerick, Buttevant, Athlone and Tempelmore.<sup>22</sup> Prostitutes certainly followed the troops but there are suggestions that 'respectable girls were influenced too and may have been susceptible to the uniform. In the ballad 'Inniskilling Dragoon' the 'beautiful damsel was a 'Gentleman's daughter from Monaghan Town who stood up in her coach to watch dragoons on parade'.<sup>23</sup> In the painting by Charles Henry Cooke, entitled 'St. Patrick's Day' (1867), the soldier is dancing with a respectable-looking girl. The same is true in Richard Moynihan's 'Military manoeuvres', where again a respectable- looking young lady is seen with a Dragoon Guard.<sup>24</sup>

So, then, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the proportion of Irishmen in the army decline, probably due to famine and emigration, but the Irish in the Army were still overrepresented in 1898. Nationalist opposition to Irishmen joining the army was strong by time of the Boer War but there was also opposition from the Catholic Church to the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 149-150.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.150.

<sup>23</sup> Traditional Irish ballad.

<sup>24</sup> J. Moynahan 'Military Manoeuvres 'A Painting in National Gallery, Dublin, showing a soldier with a girl, being followed by a group of boys, wearing paper hats and carrying wooden swords.

presence of soldiers on the streets of Dublin and parental pressure not to join the army, whose members were frequently looked down on as uneducated and immoral.

By the outbreak of the war in 1914 there appears to have been a significant shift in attitudes regarding soldiering, recruitment and indeed in the relationship between Britain and Ireland. In the years since the Boer war, Ireland had become more militarist. In 1914 there were over 100,000 Irish Volunteers and almost the same number in the UVF. Nationalist Ireland, so opposed to the Boer War, now supported Britain's war effort. This change of heart was greatest in the Irish Parliamentary Party, where Redmond was keenly pro-war. This view was reflected in the Nationalist press as well as in the Southern Unionist papers. In a survey of the provincial press, Thomas Hennessy demonstrated that a majority of the local papers supported Redmond.<sup>25</sup> Redmond's support was partly due to a debt he felt he owed to Britain for the passing of a Home Rule bill in 1914. Other Irish opinion was outraged by reports of German atrocities in Belgium and, while the British government was quick to use these to its best advantage, witnesses like Thomas Kettle MP, in Belgium on a mission to purchase arms for the Irish Volunteers, was so horrified by German actions that he joined the British army on his return and advised others to do likewise. Kettle's account was far from being sensationalist and was presented through the findings of the Belgian Committee. It dealt with atrocities such as the German use of exploding bullets, murder and mutilation, dropping bombs and the destruction and confiscation of private property.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> T. Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland* (London, 1998), pp.47-61.

<sup>26</sup> S. Pasetta, 'Thomas Kettle', in A. Gregory and S. Pasetta (eds), *Ireland and the Great War* (Manchester, 2002), p. 10.

The destruction of Louvain, with its Irish Franciscan College and long association with Ireland, caused outrage. There was a focus on 'Catholic' Belgium in the Nationalist press and even within the Redmond family there were personal connections with the Irish Benedictine Convent in Ypres.<sup>27</sup> The same convent was the home to a banner captured by the Irish Brigade at Ramillies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Redmond himself stressed the role of religion in his Woodenbridge speech when he claimed that 'the war is undertaken in defence of religion, morality and right'.<sup>28</sup> The Catholic and Irish link with Belgium was even exploited in the 'Church of Ireland Gazette' which asked 'Can the manhood of Roman Catholic Ireland remain unmoved by the burning of Louvain and the murder of Irish priests?'<sup>29</sup> In one of his poorer recruiting speeches, Redmond described nuns being chased naked through the streets by German soldiers.<sup>30</sup>

The attitude of the Party thus underwent a change in the opening months of the war and, given the stress placed on religion by the Party, it might be expected that, despite reservations in the past, the Catholic Church would have been supportive of the war effort. While it is true that many prelates (even a majority) did support Redmond and the party, there were several important exceptions. Neither Cardinal Logue of Armagh nor Archbishop Walsh of Dublin gave wholehearted support. Walsh's secretary went as far as to say 'The Archbishop deplored the Irish Party's recruiting campaign and regarded it as

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<sup>27</sup> P. Maume, *Long Gestation, Irish Nationalist Life, 1891-1914* (Dublin, 1999), p. 148.

<sup>28</sup> K. Jefferies, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 18 September 1914.

<sup>30</sup> P. Maume, *Long Gestation*, p.160.

the inevitable result of their parliamentary subservience to the Liberals'.<sup>31</sup> Another bishop, James O'Dwyer of Limerick, actively opposed recruitment, the war effort and eventually the British presence in Ireland altogether. His dioceses did not send one secular priest to the war as a chaplain. The other bishops in general supported the war effort but, while they often sent letters of support to recruiting meetings or allowed their names to appear on recruiting posters, none actually appeared on a recruiting platform. Priests, on the other hand, did. Michael Moore, in an article on the forgotten contribution of his great-grandfather, wrote that he went to war 'due to the influence exerted by a combination of the Catholic Church and Nationalist politicians' and he mentions Rev. H Beauchamp of Portarlinton who encouraged recruitment in the area and appeared on recruitment platforms.<sup>32</sup> Church support for the war was also noted in *The Irish Worker*, where a priest was depicted carrying a gun, leading men to war.<sup>33</sup>

It would be incorrect to blame the Church for wholesale enlistments and the reasons for joining up were varied. Fitzpatrick argues that 'the decision to become a soldier cannot entirely be explained in terms of rational action'.<sup>34</sup> The role played by the Church does not feature in Fitzpatrick's criteria at all. By December 1915, approximately

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<sup>31</sup> *Witness statements to Bureau of Military History 1913-21*, [hereinafter cited as W.S.B.M.H.] Monsignor Curran WS.687.

<sup>32</sup> M. Moore, 'Irish Soldiers and World War I: An Exploration of Betrayal' (National University of Ireland, Maynooth, MA Dissertation, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Aan de Wiel, *Catholic Church in Ireland*, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> D. Fitzpatrick 'Logic of collective sacrifice', p. 1017.

45,000 Catholics had joined the army.<sup>35</sup> These men needed the ministrations of Catholic priests and if local priests in garrison towns had customarily provided this service, this was not adequate on the Western Front. The number of chaplains needed to be increased drastically and quickly. The Irish Hierarchy had, however, absolutely no input into army chaplaincy which was controlled by the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Francis Bourne.

In contrast to the rest of Great Britain, Catholic priests who applied for commissions were not always doing so with the wholehearted support of their superiors. The Irish Catholic church was far from united on the war effort and this was apparent in the attitude of many Catholic priests. Of the witness statements later furnished to the Bureau of Military History, over twenty were from priests\*. Throughout the period of the war they actively pursued a policy of 'advanced nationalism' and were openly hostile to the British Administration in Ireland. In their statements there is rarely a mention of the war, suggesting perhaps its lack of importance to their lives and careers. At least one hints at the support of his bishop for his political work and this bishop was not one of those who actively opposed Irish involvement in the war.<sup>36</sup> Priests who served as chaplains did not necessarily support the British cause and several were republican, serving only

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<sup>35</sup>Aan de Wiel, *Catholic Church in Ireland*, p.17.

\*During the 1930's-1960's the Irish Army asked for witness statements from everyone involved in the struggle for independence. These statements were kept by the Army in the Bureau of Military Affairs at Griffith Barracks. The Archive was opened in 2005. Copies of the witness statements are also kept at the public record office in Dublin.

<sup>36</sup>WSBMH., Rev. Fr. Murphy, WS.1277.

because they felt it was their duty to provide the sacraments for Catholic soldiers. Fr. Dominic O'Connor, a Capuchin had served as chaplain in Salonika, but later became chaplain to Terence Mc Sweeny and faced a British military court.<sup>37</sup>

A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to trying to ascertain why Irish men enlisted in the army in great numbers in 1914. The same question could be asked of Irish Catholic chaplains who were receiving such ambivalent messages from their superiors. There was certainly a huge amount of sympathy with the plight of Irish soldiers. This comes across in Fr. McRory's diary in relation to his Connaught Rangers and also in the case of Fr. Gleeson and his 'Munsters'. There are perhaps other reasons in the case of the Jesuits, 31 of whom served from the Irish Province. There was a close connection between the Jesuits and the Irish Party. A large proportion of Irish MPs, including the Redmonds, were educated in Jesuit Colleges and the son of one MP, John Fitzgibbon , was killed while serving as a Jesuit chaplain in France.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>WSBMH., Fr. Aloysius OFM, WS.207.

<sup>38</sup>Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 153.

## Chapter 1

### The Priests

#### The Irish Catholic Church in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The religious experience of the men who joined the army in 1914 was the product of huge changes that had taken place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Irish Catholics in 1914 had experienced a very different religion to their ancestors who had fought Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. Larkin referred to it as a devotional revolution brought about largely by the work of Cardinal Paul Cullen.<sup>39</sup> Corish, however, suggests that population change as a result of the famine, combined with an increase in papal centralisation under Pius IX, was a more likely cause and that there was a move to a type of tridentine or neo-tridentine Catholicism which was, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, emanating from Rome.<sup>40</sup> Larkin describes an Irish church which was out of touch with Rome and which was corrupt in many areas. He gives an example of a letter to Tobias Kirby from an ex-priest in Waterford, J.P. Cooke, where he comments on the clerical indiscipline of the clergy after the famine. He gives other examples taken from the archives of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith where he mentions complaints regarding whiskey drinking and a toleration of adultery. In an example taken from the diocese of Killaloe a priest was charged with 'having

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<sup>39</sup>E. Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75, *American Historical Review*, 77, 1972, pp. 625-52.

<sup>40</sup>P. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience* (Dublin, 1985), p. 194.



occasioned the separation of man and wife'. He goes on to point out that, when charged with adultery, the priest in question had other priests support him and Dr. O'Shaughnessy (Bishop of Killaloe) believed that the business was shocking 'and that our Holy Religion would be less-wounded, and less scandal given would by not stirring the embers further'.<sup>41</sup> Larkin cites a further example from Clogher diocese where the Bishop, Dr. Murphy, was unable to discipline two priests as they demanded tribunals of inquiry and in fact refused to appear before the bishop at all.<sup>42</sup>

Larkin also highlights other abuses in the Irish Church in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main concern of the laity seems to have been the avarice of priests particularly in relation to marriages and 'stations' or (house Masses) or indeed any other sacraments that were carried out in the houses of parishioners. These house services were as a result of a shortage of chapels and an increase in the population. Corish notes that in the Armagh dioceses, excluding Drogheda, there was one Sunday Mass for 1,700 people.<sup>43</sup> Larkin points out that in pre-famine Ireland there were 'very few churches and no chapels that could accommodate a thousand worshippers'.<sup>44</sup> His figures are similar to Corish as he believes that in 1840 if all priests said two Masses, the number of people at each Mass would amount to over 1,500 which would result in most people hearing Mass outside a church or chapel. On top of this, Corish points out that it was unusual for priests to say two Masses on Sunday. The tridentine church referred to this as the practice of biate and

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<sup>41</sup> Larkin, 'Devotional Revolution', p.628.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.629

<sup>43</sup> Corish, *Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 159.

<sup>44</sup> Larkin 'Devotional Revolution', p. 636.

saw in it the potential for abuse. The statutes of Cashel (1810) had specified that it only be allowed if the priest had two chapels in his parish and no curate.<sup>45</sup>

Complaints about 'station Masses', came from many sources. It was felt that there was insufficient privacy in private houses for proper confession because there were so many people gathered in a small space. Paul Cullen was particularly worried about women making confessions and insisted that they go to church and into a proper confessional.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand 'stations' were praised by many clerics and as late as the 1890's Canon Sheehan supported them. In *My New Curate* the young priest is regarded as too posh by many of the parishioners and is even described as an 'English Priest'. Nonetheless, he is hugely impressed by 'station Masses' to the amazement of the narrator, his Parish Priest. He tells his superior '[T]here is nothing like it in the world, such faith, such reverence, such courtesy'. He goes on to describe confessions in a station house: 'Those young men in that smoky kitchen –it took me a long time to discern their faces in the gloom of the smoke.....strong, brave mountaineers, their faces ruddy from sun and wind; and such a reverential attitude! And then the idea of their coming over to me, a young lad like themselves, and kneeling down on the cobblestones and whispering their little story'.<sup>47</sup> It is, in fact, the older parish priest who describes the station Mass in the following way: 'The saying of Mass on a deal table, with a horse-collar overhead, and a huge collie dog beneath, and hens making frantic attempts to get on the altar cloth'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Corish, *Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 159.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>47</sup> Canon J. Sheehan, *My New Curate* (Dublin, 1899), pp. 47-48.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

A much more serious complaint against the 'stations' was the avarice of the clergy. According to Larkin, 'amongst a land-hungry and poverty stricken peasantry avarice was the deadliest of the deadly sins'.<sup>49</sup> In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it had been noted by the Dublin bishops that dues at stations 'cannot be called voluntary for custom makes them compulsory; they are contributed by every person who can give anything and vary from one shilling to five'.<sup>50</sup> In 1843, T. Chisholme Anstey, an English Catholic, commented to Giovanni Brunelli, the secretary of Propaganda Fide, that the priest would designate the houses of various parishioners who were relatively well-off as the place where he would hear confessions and say Mass that week for those in the immediate area. He also complained that Mass was being offered in cabins rather than in chapels because the fees were greater. The 'station' moreover, was obliged to offer hospitality and had to cater for the priest's choice of tradesmen and victuallers.<sup>51</sup>

James Maher writing to his nephew, Paul Cullen, in Rome in January 1842 complained that: 'The holding of Stations for Mass and Confession at private houses is the very worst system. Wretched filthy cabins have been lately honored with stations.' 'The people,' he explained,

cannot be instructed. The Priest no matter how zealous cannot do his duty. The young clergyman is brought into contact with his female penitents. The result is confessions are often invalid or sacrilegious. It is almost impossible that the poor country

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<sup>49</sup>Larkin, *Devotional Revolution*, p .632.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 632.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 635.

people in the circumstances could disclose their sins. Struggling with their natural reluctance to avow their guilt, and fearing at the same time to be overheard by those who are pressing around the Priest, who cannot utter a word of encouragement to the sinner, except in the lowest and therefore intelligible [*sic*] whisper that can be expected.<sup>52</sup>

Another problem seems to be that alcoholic drink was supplied at house Masses. House devotions were frowned on by the reforming Cullen and many attempts were made to get the sacraments moved into the new chapels as they were enlarged, rebuilt or improved. Marriages, funerals and baptisms were moved into the new chapels and churches during the latter part of the century and, as the quality of chapels improved, the blessed sacrament was housed in them. House Masses persisted into the twentieth century where they became respectable again after Vatican II.

In 1883 the artist Aloysius O’Kelly painted what was certainly a station Mass in a cabin in Connemara. As in Sheehan, the kitchen table is the altar placed under a half attic which serves as the bedroom with straw falling on the congregation below. The priest in the painting is young and very earnest and is possibly saying his first Mass. Interestingly, on the wall is a picture of the Sacred Heart which was a devotion particularly associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century and one of the devotions favoured by Cullen, so even if all his reforms did not succeed, it is certain that his influence was felt. The attitude of Cullen towards the stations reflects the changes taking place in 19<sup>th</sup> century Catholicism across Europe as well as Ireland. Increased control of bishops by the papacy in turn led to greater

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 636.

episcopal control over parish clergy. This increased control was often resented by the parish priests who saw it as interference. Sheehan touches on episcopal powers in *My New Curate*. Both at the start of the novel and again at the end, the bishop sends a curate to the parish without any consultation with the parish priest who would not necessarily have chosen the curate himself. In terms of episcopal power, Cullen increased control over the Irish church through the weapon of the synod, beginning with the Synod of Thurles in 1850 and ending with the second Synod of Maynooth in 1875. The reforms changed the Irish Church into what became recognisable as the Catholic Church of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with almost 100 per cent Sunday Mass attendances. In examining the reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is important that some related to the clergy and some to the laity. As noted earlier, the practice of 'stations' in private houses was a controversial issue in that attempts to abolish it had led to opposition from many priests and several bishops and, as I have said, it persists in parts of the South and West.

Other practices associated with pre-famine Catholicism in Ireland and which came under severe attack were the 'pattern' and the Irish wake. Patterns were particularly disliked by reforming bishops and were believed to be a survivor of Ireland's pagan past, although this view has been challenged by Michael Carroll.<sup>53</sup> Patterns were pilgrimages to local holy places, often wells, associated with a local holy person (usually a male saint). The focus of the pilgrimage consisted of 'rounds', i.e. walking around an object, a stone, flat stone or bed or wells whilst praying repetitively (e.g. several paters followed by aves etc.) These patterns were often seasonal in that they were held in the same place on the

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<sup>53</sup>M.P. Carroll, 'Re-thinking popular Catholicism in pre-famine Ireland', *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, 34, 1995, pp.354-65 at p.361.

same day. The patterns had become rather more than religious gatherings though and became popular meetings for many thousands of people. At Ardmore in Co. Waterford it was estimated that 12-15,000 pilgrims gathered in 1841.<sup>54</sup> They were urban as well as rural; five separate patterns were held in Dublin city. In general it appeared that the parish clergy did little to oppose this, accepting them as examples of popular Catholicism. Michael Carroll believes that it was the penal laws which had encouraged such popular religious practices and also that both priests and people both shared these beliefs and values.<sup>55</sup> It was more the secular aspects of the pattern that upset the Church leaders. Ever since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there had been edicts regarding behaviour at the patterns. Corish quotes Humphry O'Sullivan's description of a pattern in Co. Kilkenny in 1829: 'Strong and maddening whiskey for those who wanted a row and those who wanted to separate them; open booths full of courting couples; bagpipers and fiddlers playing music for the young people; and pious people doing the rounds at the well.'<sup>56</sup> The abuse of alcohol leading to debauchery and violence was a concern for the clergy but it was not the only one. Many of the commentators were Protestant clergymen who were horrified by the superstition of the people of rural Ireland. While some were simply anti-Catholic, others seem genuinely shocked. In a reference to a pilgrimage to Holy Island in Co. Clare, an observer considered 'it is lamentable to consider the extent to which idolatry prevails in this benighted country'<sup>57</sup>. The pattern of St. Declan at Ardmore was described as 'this

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.358.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.360.

<sup>56</sup> Corish, *Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 181.

<sup>57</sup> Philip Dixon Hardy, *The Holy Wells of Ireland*, (Dublin, 1840), p.27.

annual scene of disgusting superstition'.<sup>58</sup> The presence of priests at these events is pointed out and one account claimed that 'the priest of Corrin in Co. Sligo demanded a shilling from everyone that confessed' and that another priest in a parish close by invented his own holy well and started up a pattern to cash in on the act.<sup>59</sup>

Whether the patterns were survivors from a pagan past or an example of 19<sup>th</sup> century popular Catholicism, priests did attend and officiate at them and often gave repetitious penances to be said at holy places. If attendance at patterns was high in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, attendance at Mass in Ireland was not universally so. In the very areas where Patterns seem to have been most popular, Mass attendance was low. In 1834, Miller believed that Mass attendance in Irish-speaking areas was between 20 and 40%.<sup>60</sup> Corish adjusts this to a higher 25-50% (not a high attendance by the standards of 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland).<sup>61</sup> In a survey of twenty-eight parishes in Tipperary for 1835, James O'Shea calculates a figure of 45% of the population attending Mass but even here there are fluctuations between parishes. One, Ballingarry, had a Mass attendance of 13%.<sup>62</sup> Tipperary was not generally an Irish-speaking area. Larkin believes that the low attendance in Irish-speaking parts of the country was due to a lack of priests on the one hand and a lack of chapels and churches on the other. Other historians have suggested

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> D. Miller, 'Mass attendance in Ireland in 1834', in S. Brown and D. Miller (eds), *Piety and Power in Ireland 1760-1960* (Dublin, 2000), p. 173.

<sup>61</sup> Corish, *Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 187.

<sup>62</sup> James O'Shea, *Priest, Politics and Society* (Dublin, 1983), p. 33.

that in pre-famine Ireland where the population had increased rapidly during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and where marginal land was being cultivated, the journey to chapel for Mass may have been too long. Another view was that the poverty in parts of Connaught was so severe that only one member of a family could afford the respectable clothes needed for Mass.

### The changing face of Irish Catholicism

Irish-speaking Ireland was not the whole story, however. Both Larkin and Corish agree that there was a prosperous South and East where Roman devotions were in place in the early part of the century and where, even earlier, new churches and even cathedrals were appearing. New cathedrals were built in Waterford in 1793, Cork in 1799, Dublin in 1825 and Carlow in 1828. The same survey of Mass attendance which illustrated the low turnout in the Irish-speaking areas also showed figures of two thirds attendance in Cork, Limerick and Dublin.<sup>63</sup> In Waterford he found that, in 1840, there were Masses until noon on Sunday, benediction on two Sundays per month and benediction with a sermon on the 'first' Friday. There was an average of 350 communicants per Sunday and over 600 on the first Sunday of the month. There were devotions every evening during Lent, Advent and in May.<sup>64</sup> The English-speaking areas of the South and East, Leinster and Munster (excluding Clare) and the extreme South West were much richer and in the towns of these areas, there were confraternities, sodalities and parish missions. The parish Mission, in which Cullen later placed much faith, was known in 1843 in Carlow and Athy while station Masses were discouraged in Dublin from as early as 1831. Miller

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<sup>63</sup>Corish, *Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 169.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.



mapped Mass attendance based on the results of the 1834 figures and arrived at a Southeast/Northwest divide. The further West, the lower the Mass attendance, resulting in a 0-20% rate in the extremities of the North, West and Southwest.<sup>65</sup> These, too, were the areas of fewest clergy. Corish compares the numbers in two dioceses in the mid 1830's. Ferns in Wexford had about 2000 Catholics per priest while the archdiocese of Tuam in the Irish-speaking West had over 4000.<sup>66</sup>

The Irish Church in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century seems to have been in need of uniformity and the Devotional Revolution was really such a process. By 1890 the Irish Catholic Church had changed. The number of clergy dramatically increased in a falling population, the number of nuns increased threefold and the ratio of priests to people more than doubled. Many of the new priests came from continental orders - Jesuits, Vincentians, Redemptorists, Carmelites and Dominicans and with them came continental-type devotions. Missions were held in nearly every parish. Indulgences were given as spiritual rewards.

The new devotions were mainly of Roman origin and included the rosary, forty hours, perpetual adoration, novenas, blessed altars, *Via Crucis*, benediction, vespers, devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Conception, jubilees, triduums, pilgrimages, shrines, processions, and retreats. These devotional exercises, moreover, were organized in order to communalize and

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<sup>65</sup> Miller, *Piety and Power in Ireland*, p.173.

<sup>66</sup> P. Corish, 'Catholic Community in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', *Archivum Hibernicum*, 38, 1983, pp.26-34 at p.27.

regularize practice under a spiritual director and included sodalities, confraternities such as the various purgatorian societies, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and Peter's Pence as well as temperance and altar societies. These public exercises were also reinforced by the use of devotional tools and aids: beads, scapulars, medals, missals, prayer books, catechisms, holy pictures, and *Agnus Dei*, all blessed by priests who had recently acquired that privilege from Rome through the intercession of their bishops. Furthermore, this was the period when the whole world of the senses was explored in these devotional exercises, and especially in the Mass, through music, singing, candles, vestments, and incense .<sup>67</sup>

The result of these changes is that Mass-going increased to make up what Miller refers to as 'almost universal fulfilment of canonical obligation in mid twentieth-century Catholic Ireland.'<sup>68</sup>

The changes in the Irish Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century perhaps led to a change in the type of priest in Ireland. Canon Sheehan certainly thought so. In *My New Curate* he describes the type of priests common in post-famine Ireland as he saw them:

[T]he strongest, fiercest, most fearless army of priests that ever fought for the spiritual and temporal interests of the people -men of large physique and iron constitutions, who spent ten

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<sup>67</sup> Larkin, 'Devotional Revolution', p. 645.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, *Piety and Power*, p. 158.

hours a day on horseback, despised French claret, loved their people and chastised them like fathers, but were prepared to defend them with their lives and the outpouring of their blood against their hereditary enemies. Intense in their faith, of stainless lives and spotless reputations, their words cut like razors, and their hands smote like lightning; but they had the hearts of mothers for the little ones of their flocks. They had the classics at their fingers' ends, could roll out lines from Virgil or Horace at an after-dinner speech, and had a profound contempt for English literature. In theology they were rigorists, too much disposed to defer absolution and to give long penances. They had a cordial dislike for new devotions, believing that Christmas and Easter Communion was quite enough for ordinary sanctity. Later on they became more generous, but they clung with tenacity to the Brown Scapular and the First Sunday of the month.<sup>69</sup>

Sheehan, of course, identified himself with that type which he refers to as the 'Maynooth Priest' but in his own parish he introduced many of the new type of devotions. Nor did he himself show contempt for English literature which he read widely. He came from North Cork, the bulk of the area was English-speaking although there were parts of the poorer areas still Irish-speaking as testified to by a contemporary of his, Peadar O'Laoghaire<sup>70</sup>.

### The Priest and social class

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<sup>69</sup>Sheehan, *My New Curate*, p. 165.

<sup>70</sup>An tAthair Peadar O'Laoghaire, *Mo Sceal Fein* [My Own Story] (Dublin 1915), p. 16.

In terms of their background, James O'Shea, in a study of Tipperary priests from the 1850's to the 1890's, investigated the background of all the priests who served in Tipperary at that time.<sup>71</sup> In general, he found that they all had a common social background 'The majority of Tipperary priests (1850-91) whose birthplaces are known, were the sons of farmers'<sup>72</sup>. He refers to them as 'sons of the soil'; not surprising then that they managed to spend 'ten hours on horseback' as Sheehan mentioned. He goes on to point out that not only were the farms they rented large, they were in the most fertile parts of the county and usually commanded the highest rent in the area. He also points out that some priests came from families that had more than one farm.

The main reason that the priests were from the wealthy farmer background was the high cost of educating a priest. Peadar O'Laoghaire mentions the hardship for the families concerned and he discusses ways in which the cost of an education could be kept lower. However, from O'Shea's research it would suggest his family was uncommon.<sup>73</sup> O'Shea points out that the average value of livestock on a farm of 16-30 acres was £46. He then examines the fees charged at various seminaries. Thurles charged thirty guineas per annum, Carlow £25 plus £25 expenses. Maynooth was cheapest in that it was state endowed and 52% of Tipperary priests went there but here expenses could vary between £14 and £70. Continental seminaries were just as expensive. Rome was thirty guineas plus £25, expenses Salamanca £45 in 1825 and Paris which offered bursaries to five priests per year, was also considered expensive.

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<sup>71</sup> J. O'Shea, *Priest, Politics and Society*, (Dublin 1983), pp.13-14.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>73</sup> O'Laoghaire, *Mo Sceal Fein*, p. 24.

It is reasonable to infer that Irish Catholic priests came from a well-off farming background and therefore suggestions made about the background of Catholic priests employed as chaplains in the First World War, namely that they came from the same background as their men, is unlikely to be the case. Richard Holmes in *Tommy* says:

Many Church of England Chaplains came from middle-class backgrounds (it) made it hard for them to empathise with the soldiers to whom they ministered. In contrast, Roman Catholic chaplains often came from working-class backgrounds. Fr Willie Doyle was the youngest of seven children of a devout Irish Roman Catholic family and three of his brothers became priests. Cardinal John Heenan of Westminster 1963-75 was fond of relating that he had been in the seminary with ex-lance Corporal Masterson, later archbishop of Birmingham and ex-sergeant Griffin, later Archbishop of Westminster.<sup>74</sup>

Jane Leonard also comments on Church of England Chaplains being of the same class as officers, implying that Irish Catholic Chaplains were not.<sup>75</sup> While it is true that Irish Catholic chaplains were not of the same class as officers of Irish regiments, with some exceptions during the War, they were certainly not of the same class as the men.

Holmes' suggestion that Doyle was from a lower class is particularly unfortunate in that he was a Jesuit whose education required up to fifteen years. Several of Doyle's

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<sup>74</sup> R. Holmes, *Tommy, The British Soldier On The Western Front 1914-1918* (London, 2005), p. 506.

<sup>75</sup> J. Leonard, 'Chaplains', in D. Fitzpatrick (ed.) *Ireland and the First World War* (Dublin, 1986),

p. 10.

colleagues were Jesuits. One in particular, Fr. Browne, was a famous photographer who travelled on the first leg of *the Titanic's* maiden voyage (as far as Queenstown). Fr. Browne was obviously from a well-to-do background, as was Fr. Bernard Page whose parents were visiting Bruges in 1914 and were caught behind German lines when the city fell. Fr. Doyle did come from a large devout family but he was born in Dalkey and his father was an official in the High Court of Justice in Dublin and his brother followed in his father's footsteps by entering the legal profession and later becoming Recorder of Galway. He also spent his youth playing on Dalkey hill and raising money for the poor through St. Vincent de Paul.<sup>76</sup>

Being from a well off background was important in becoming a priest, but there were other important factors too. Young applicants were expected to display a strong religious conviction, to have a high standard of education and, most importantly, to be healthy. Peadar O'Laoghaire felt that Maynooth was dangerous to student's health and gives examples of fellow students, including himself, who became ill and one who died. He blamed the diet at the college which, he believed, was too rich in meat and lacking in potatoes and meal. He also claimed bad air was the problem due to the canal and low lying grounds.<sup>77</sup>

Education at Maynooth and other seminaries was unimaginative. Examinations were based purely on memory and lasted up to five hours. A sound knowledge of Latin was required because lectures were given in that language. The standard of Latin at

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<sup>76</sup> A. O'Reilly, *Martyr Priest the Life of Fr. William Doyle* (Limerick, 1929), p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> O'Laoghaire, *Mo Sceal Fein*, pp. 48-50.

Maynooth was considered poor compared to the standard in the Irish College in Rome. English and French were both taught at Maynooth. Sheehan's view that English literature was held in contempt is not borne out by O'Laoghaire who was proud to win first prize for an essay on 'the Elizabethan age in English Literature'. The college considered it important enough to invite 'six or seven' bishops to award the prize. The archbishop of Tuam, while congratulating O'Laoghaire on his achievement also said to him 'You did well, boy,...you did a circuit of them all. You praised the literature of Greece. You praised the literature of Rome. You praised the literature of France and Spain and Germany. You praised English literature highly. And look, not as much as one word did you say about the literature of Ireland'.<sup>78</sup> The archbishop of Tuam was John MacHale who had opposed all attempts by Cullen to Romanise his archdiocese and he was also a supporter of the Fenian Brotherhood. O'Laoghaire said he felt rebuked in front of all the bishops and the president of the college but he did accept that MacHale was right. Irish was, in fact, still very important and was taught at both Maynooth and Paris. The synod of Cashel in 1853 placed responsibility upon the bishops to see that their priests were proficient in Irish.

Discipline at all the colleges seems to have been harsh. At Maynooth there were nine hours of study and two hours of spiritual exercises. Silence was necessary during study, meals and lectures. Rome was similar, as was Paris, where the Irish hierarchy drew up the college rules. In general, there were few expulsions mainly because of the shortage of priests. The education received at Maynooth could hardly be considered to be a liberal one. O'Shea argues that there were few religious exercises and that the regime 'might be

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

monastic but they were not monasteries'.<sup>79</sup> Lord Beaumont noted that the role of Maynooth was to 'instruct the students merely as Roman Catholic priests and nothing else, it gives them no other education but that which is suited to Roman Catholic priests'.<sup>80</sup> Similar criticism was made by Sheehan in his novels. In *Luke Delmege* the young clerical student was bitterly disappointed when he returned home from Maynooth with the top prize, 'first of firsts', to find that the local clergy are unimpressed with his achievement. Later on in the story, two country curates are discussing Maynooth. Fr. Martin says: 'What are these professors doing in these colleges at all, at all.....Why do they turn out such raw young fellows at all, at all? 'Why indeed?' said Fr. Tim.<sup>81</sup>

When a student survived the harsh discipline of the seminary or college , and the vast majority of them did, the curate could look forward to a prosperous lifestyle. They were not bothered by financial worries, receiving money from Masses, collections, baptisms, marriages and funerals. They also received a salary. Parish priests fared even better. They were able to keep themselves 'in a style which was at least equal to and generally superior to, the better-off farmers of the parish'.<sup>82</sup> In a letter from a parish priest to Bishop John Power, an irate Parish Priest responds to a complaint about him to his curate: 'No wonder he may complain of a cold leg of mutton for dinner at my table

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<sup>79</sup> O Shea, *Priest, Politics and Society*, p.20.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>81</sup> J. Sheehan, *Luke Delmege* (Dublin, 1901), p. 41.

<sup>82</sup> O'Shea, *Priest, Politics and Society*, p. 23.



when he lunches upon such dainties as roast chicken and brandy at the convent'.<sup>83</sup> This was at a time when the diet of most Irish people was still based on potatoes.

### The role of the Priest as leader of the community

By virtue of their education and their wealth, the priests were in fact leaders of their communities. In the society in which they lived, literacy rates were not high. The role of leader was filled in a variety of ways. In Sheehan's *My New Curate* the parish priest (and narrator) is referred to by his parishioners as 'Daddy Dan' and he sees his role as a father-figure in the parish. His flock are seen as children to be encouraged and criticised. Garvin states that 'the leaders of independent Ireland after 1921 came from a culture dominated by the Catholic world view and their real intellectual mentors were the priests of the Catholic church.'<sup>84</sup> Sheehan demonstrated leadership in a variety of ways. In *My New Curate* the new curate is keen to improve the lot of his parishioners by suggesting the building of a factory and a new harbour and by raising the necessary capital from the Catholic merchants in the town.<sup>85</sup> In a speech to the students at Maynooth in 1903, Sheehan made the following point; 'priests have the lead and they must keep it. But the right of leadership, now often questioned, must be supported by tangible and repeated proofs; and the proofs must concern not only your spiritual authority, but your intellectual superiority'.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>84</sup>T. Garvin, 'Priests and Patriots', *Irish Historical Studies*, 98, 1986, pp. 66-71, at p. 67.

<sup>85</sup>Sheehan, *My New Curate*, p. 57.

<sup>86</sup>R. Fleischmann, *Catholic Nationalism in the Irish Revival* (London, 1997), p. 97.

The priest as a social improver can be observed in *My New Curate*. The young curate is opposed to the many public houses and wants to reduce them from seven to one. Priests in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland were concerned about the effects of drink on their parishioners and on Irish society. In *Mo Sceal Fein*, O'Laoghaire notes the 'dreadful damage that drinking was doing to the Irish people...I thought I should begin the work by asking everyone to abstain from all intoxicating drink'.<sup>87</sup> He organized a reading club for young people to keep them away from public houses. Pre-famine Ireland had been deeply affected by the temperance campaign of Fr. Mathew and the consumption of whiskey had in fact fallen considerably, but after the famine, the problem seems to have been as bad. Bishop Slattery set up St. Paul's Total Abstinence Society. This was a teetotal benevolent society which also involved members being bound to attend the sacraments of penance and Eucharist at Easter and Christmas. In return there was sickness benefit, an old age pension and funeral expenses were paid. This type of activity encouraged abstinence but the Irish church was also involved in forcing the issue. Archbishop Leahy of Cashel banned Sunday drinking and made it a reserved sin to buy or sell alcohol on Sunday. In 1870 Dr. Croke forbade priests from saying funeral masses at houses where drink was supplied. In 1890, in a circular to all priests, he demanded all priests seek a guarantee from the head of the household where a mass was to be said that the occasion be drink-free. Deception on the part of the head of household was, too, a reserved sin (a sin that had to be confessed to a bishop). In *Luke Delmege*, Luke refused to bury a corpse because the mourners had been 'drinking'. This decision was deeply unpopular with the relatives of the dead man and Luke got little support from his parish Priest who felt the rules were being interpreted too harshly, suggesting that Sheehan had a sympathetic view of some

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<sup>87</sup>O'Laoghaire, *Mo Sceal Fein*, pp. 77-78.

ancient Irish peasant burial customs. Also reserved for the bishop were the sins of poteen-making and ether drinking.<sup>88</sup>

As leaders of the community, priests ensured sexual propriety. In *My New Curate* Father Dan points out to the new curate, an older priest, who he says with admiration, 'has not had a scandal in his parish for fourteen years.'<sup>89</sup> In order to prevent scandal, dances were tightly supervised by priests and sometimes banned. All night dances and those held outside at crossroads were frowned upon and discouraged. In some cases, all house dances were banned. J.B. Keane, in *The Bodhran Makers*, describes how the clergy eventually forced the bodhran makers to stop producing them because of their use in house dances which were also forbidden.<sup>90</sup> It was not unknown for priests to prowl country lanes in search of couples who were 'keeping company'.

In other areas of social life the priest was again the leader. Nearly all school managers were priests or other ministers. In *The Blindness of Dr. Gray*, Sheehan shows the advantages of this when a group of parishioners wish to remove the teacher because he is the nephew of an alleged land grabber. Dr. Gray refuses to remove a competent teacher and in the end is proved right, as it emerges that the campaign to remove the teacher is orchestrated by a clique who had wanted the land themselves.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Sheehan, *Luke Delmege*, p. 354.

<sup>89</sup> Sheehan, *My New Curate*, p. 171.

<sup>90</sup>J.B.Keane, *The Bodhran Makers*, (Dublin, 1993).

<sup>91</sup> Sheehan , *The Blindness of Dr Gray* (Dublin, 1909), p. 42.

## The Priest and politics

It is in political leadership, however, that the clergy had the biggest impact on their flocks. In Tipperary, O'Shea provides evidence suggesting that 77% of Tipperary priests were involved in politics between 1850 and 1890. The priests came mainly from well-off families, mainly tenant farmers who were the dominant class in Ireland after the famine. Their politics reflected this background. They were generally conservative on both social and political issues and pro-tenant in the land war. Their anti-Fenianism probably stemmed as much from the fact that the Fenians were often from the labouring and artisan backgrounds and the farming class had little interest in republican ideals. As a result, the majority of the clergy tended to support the constitutional methods of the Irish Party.

Priests supported the raising of funds to give the MP's of Parnell's party a salary; Dr Croke of Cashel contributed £340 to the fund in 1886, almost all of it from himself and his priests.<sup>92</sup> Support for the centralizing nature of Parnellism was in fact first given by the priests who encouraged the laity to become involved in politics. The priest may well have seen Parnellism and Home Rule as less dangerous than Fenianism, which might well explain their attitudes. The very centralization of the Irish Party, according to O'Shea, resulted in a revitalised role for the Catholic Clergy.<sup>93</sup> The fall of Parnell did highlight the continued importance of the Irish Party in politics although in another way it created anti-clericalism in some urban areas. This was largely due to the split in the Parliamentary Party. The majority of Irish MPs refused to support Parnell's continued leadership after

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<sup>92</sup> O'Shea, *Priests, Politics and Society*, p. 207.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

the divorce scandal became known. The Church became highly critical of Parnell. He did retain a great deal of support in some parts of Ireland, especially in Dublin and Cork where pro-Parnellites were very critical of the Church for getting involved in politics. As all Irish Party MPs all voted together in Westminster and as a second Home Rule bill was introduced in 1893, it is unlikely that the Parnell split damaged the Home Rule cause in the short term. Clerical interest was much more influenced by land issues. This again was not surprising as we have already noted that the vast majority of priests came from a tenant farmer background and attitudes were generally anti-landlord. In the *Blindness of Dr Gray*, Gray berates a landlord and refers to his class as 'selfish and unprincipled'.<sup>94</sup> This can be seen in their attitudes towards evictions which they opposed irrespective of the cause. O'Shea argues that they were instrumental in ending the culture 'of deference towards landlords in general. Indeed during the land war, the priests displayed a conscious determination to end this traditional social phenomenon'.<sup>95</sup>

The Church's attitude to radical politics was not always unanimous. In the archdiocese of Tuam, John McHale had appointed a pro-Fenian priest and defended him from attacks by both Cullen in Dublin and from Rome. Sheehan's view of the Fenians appears to be at odds with the view of Cullen and the majority of the hierarchy. In the *Blindness of Dr Gray*, Sheehan shows respect and admiration for the Fenians. He (Dr Gray) tells of meeting a group of Fenians on a moonlight night in a wood. 'I knew all these fellows well... and in ordinary life, made little of them. But, somehow, the fact of their being Fenians threw a glamour around them in my mind's eye; and I never after met them

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<sup>94</sup> Sheehan, *Blindness of Dr Gray*, p. 131.

<sup>95</sup> O'Shea, *Priest, Politics and Society*, p. 242.

in the ordinary walks of life, but I looked on them with a kind of shy respect. It was the *idea* that glorified and transfigured these poor workmen into patriots.’<sup>96</sup> Sheehan was unusual too in his opinion of land reform. Referring to the Land League slogan, ‘The Land for the People’ he says ‘They’ve got it now! They have the land; and they fling Ireland to the devil. Each man’s interest is centred on his own bounds-ditch’.<sup>97</sup> In *Luke Delmerge*, Sheehan has Luke, the young curate, singing a rebel song for his parish priest and guests at the parish priest’s dinner, including a lawyer, a doctor, the guests and some ladies. The Canon was ‘shocked beyond expression; yet a tender old-time feeling seemed to film his eyes’.<sup>98</sup>

Even within the hierarchy, which had publicly opposed Fenianism, there was some underlying sympathy. Dr. Moriarty of Kerry claimed, famously, that ‘hell is not hot enough nor eternity long enough to punish those miscreants’,<sup>99</sup> yet later in 1868 he stated to his friend William Monsell (Liberal and anti-Home Rule MP for Limerick), ‘The clergy will preach against rebellion on account of the evils it will bring on the people, but I am sure that their almost unanimous opinion [is, that] if there were a fair chance of success, it would be lawful, nay dulce et decorum’.<sup>100</sup> William Croke of Doneraile, later Archbishop of

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<sup>96</sup> Sheehan, *Blindness of Dr Gray*, p .232.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p.229.

<sup>98</sup> Sheehan, *Luke Delmerge*, p .67.

<sup>99</sup> D.A Kerr, ‘Priests, Pikes and Patriots’ in S. Brown and D. Miller (eds), *Piety and Power in Ireland 1760-1960* (Dublin, 2000), p. 37.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.

Cashel, declared 'I could never bring myself to rank Fenians as a body with Freemasons.....'.<sup>101</sup>

The Irish priest was then an important leader of his flock in political as well as religious matters but his power did not end there. In rural Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was widely accepted that the priest possessed supernatural powers. Corish claims that the priest was 'a man of power' and in pre-reformation days he shared this power with the file (poet) and breatheamh (judge). 'In peasant Ireland, the priest was a father figure not lightly crossed'.<sup>102</sup> The devotional revolution did not completely change this view of the priest. It was widely believed that priests had the power to cure the sick. In a series of stories collected in the West of Ireland in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a common and strong belief that 'the Friars at Esker' could perform cures. The cures included healing the mentally ill and casting out evil spirits in a society where there was a widely held belief in fairies (sheogues). They were also credited with being able to heal broken bones, lameness and strokes. It was further believed that they could put curses on anyone who opposed them.<sup>103</sup> In other parts of Ireland, priests with a reputation for being able to cure the sick were often prayed to long after their own deaths. In Co. Kildare a Fr. Moore who died in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century is the subject of pilgrimage today. A well which he blessed is believed to cure anyone who bathes in it. Fr O'Sullivan, who died in 1933,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.39

<sup>102</sup> Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 136.

<sup>103</sup> 'Visions and beliefs in the West of Ireland, Friars and Priest cures', [www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt](http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt).

Viewed 24 Feb. 2008.

was believed to be able to cure the sick and there is still a huge demand for his relics as well as a campaign to have him canonised.<sup>104</sup>

In addition to having the gift of being able to heal, it was widely believed that the priest could curse his enemies. Stories of divine punishment being meted out to those who disobeyed the orders of a priest were plentiful throughout rural Ireland.<sup>105</sup> There are several stories recorded by the folklorist Sean O hEochaidh regarding the supernatural powers of the priests in the Donegal area. The priests are usually named and are depicted as defenders and avengers of the unfortunate:

[H]is weapons are supernatural. Sometimes he simply freezes

his opponents with his breath, but most often

he delivers a damning prophecy of great ill fortune that is to

befall his enemies [or] he pulls out the stole and puts it

around his shoulders and pulls out his book and begins to recite....

Those actions may be the prelude of anything from leading salmon

into the bay to bringing a dead Protestant up from hell.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> 'John Sullivan SJ : a loyal servant of God', [www.catholicireland.net/pages/inde](http://www.catholicireland.net/pages/inde). Viewed 4 March 2008.

<sup>105</sup> 'Visions and beliefs in the West of Ireland, Friars and Priest cures', [www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt](http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt).

Viewed 24 Feb.2008.

<sup>106</sup> L. J. Taylor, 'Social Drama and Irish Class consciousness', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 27, 1985, pp. 696-712 at p.709.



The Irish priest of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was much more than a man of religion. The devotional revolution had given him more power in terms of religious leadership in the community. Sacraments were now celebrated in churches where he was the central figure. Old ceremonies which had relied less on the priest were frowned upon and often forbidden. He was the guardian of sexual morals in his parish and the political leader of his congregation. The devotional revolution had emphasised the importance of the sacraments of Eucharist and Penance which had in the past been taken annually as Easter Duty but were by the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, usually partaken of on a monthly basis, which meant that the priest saw his parishioners on an individual basis more frequently. Often he was also an innovator, encouraging his flock to improve their lives through temperance or co-operative ventures. His judgement was mostly accepted because of his education but also because he represented the authority that the British State failed to represent to the majority of Irish Catholics. Finally, he was often seen as a man in possession of supernatural as well as natural power. The role of the priest in Ireland would influence his role on the battlefields of the First World War and the respect with which he was held in Ireland would influence his position as a chaplain on the Western Front.

## Chapter 2

### The Mission

The reputation of the Roman Catholic Chaplain emerged from the Great War greatly enhanced and, by extension, the Catholic Church in England was seen in a more favourable light. This enhanced reputation was to some extent at the expense of the Anglican Chaplains. Graves famously noted that Anglican Chaplains 'were under orders not to get mixed up in the fighting'.<sup>107</sup> Siegfried Sassoon remembered one chaplain's talk before a battle which finished with the words 'and now God go with you, I will go with you to the [clearing] station'.<sup>108</sup> More recent writers have echoed these views. Myles Dungan notes that 'Anglican chaplains were not allowed to accompany troops to the front line; Roman Catholics were'.<sup>109</sup> Ben Tillett, the dockers' leader, was surprised that 'those who were so fond of talking about heaven should be so afraid to go through its gates'.<sup>110</sup>

#### The bravery of Catholic chaplains

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<sup>107</sup>M. Snape, *God and the British Soldier, Religion in the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London., 2005), p. 83.

<sup>108</sup>Holmes, *Tommy*, p. 508.

<sup>109</sup>M. Dungan, *They Shall Grow Not Old, Irish Soldiers and the Great War* (Dublin, 1997), p. 61.

<sup>110</sup> Holmes, *Tommy* p. 508.

Catholic Chaplains, on the other hand, went up to the front line to give extreme unction to seriously ill and dying soldiers. As early as 1915 Michael MacDonagh noted that 'the record of the Catholic Army Chaplain shines splendidly for its zeal, self sacrifice and heroism'.<sup>111</sup> Robert Graves claimed that a colonel in one battalion got rid of four new Anglican chaplains in four months. Finally, he applied for an RC Chaplain alleging a change in the faith of the men in his command- 'For the RC chaplain was not only permitted to visit posts of danger but definitely enjoined to be wherever the fighting was and we have never heard of one who failed to do all that was expected of him and more'.<sup>112</sup> Colonel Nelson, in his description of Irish soldiers in the Great War, noted, 'It was said with justice that a Catholic chaplain was worth two extra officers to an Irish battalion, so great was his influence on all ranks'.<sup>113</sup> Guy Chapman complained that 'our bluff Anglicans....had nothing to offer but the consolation the next man could give you, and a less fortifying one. The Church of Rome sent a man into action mentally and physically cleansed... The Church of Rome, experienced in propaganda, sent its priests into the line.'<sup>114</sup>

Early in the war, Irish Catholic writers were quick to highlight the bravery of Irish Catholic chaplains and, in one case, a quote from a Catholic chaplain was used as a

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<sup>111</sup>M. MacDonagh, 'Irish Catholic Chaplains in the War', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Vol.6, 1915, pp. 349-361 , at p. 351.

<sup>112</sup> R. Graves, *Goodbye To All That* (London, 1969), pp. 242-243.

<sup>113</sup>C. Nelson. 'The pre-war 1914 army, Irish soldiers in the Great War', *The Irish Sword* , 11, 1974, pp. 166-72 at p.167.

<sup>114</sup>Holmes, *Tommy*, p. 514.

recruiting poster.<sup>115</sup> As early as mid 1915, Michael MacDonagh was highlighting the bravery of both Irish soldiers and Irish Catholic chaplains: 'The record of Catholic Army chaplains shines splendidly for its zeal, self –sacrifice, and heroism'. He goes on to catalogue the bravery of Fr. Gwynn of the Irish Guards, wounded at Guinchy, and the bravery and self-sacrifice of Fr. Finn, who up to that point was the only chaplain to be killed in the war. Fr. Finn was attached to an English diocese and had been educated at Ushaw College yet he was still seen as an Irish chaplain and is claimed by no fewer than three Irish counties. Myles Dungan refers to him as a 'Tipperary priest'<sup>116</sup> while, in a recent study of Galway in the Great War, he is called 'the Galway priest';<sup>117</sup> in *Mayo Comrades of the Great War*, the authors go out of the way to 'prove' his Mayo links.<sup>118</sup> Fr. Gleeson of the Munsters also got a mention and MacDonagh quoted a wounded soldier in a London hospital: 'he's a warrior and no mistake, there is no man at the Front more brave or cooler. Why it is in the hottest place up in the firing line he do be to give comfort to the boys that are dying'.<sup>119</sup> He went on to describe the blessing of the 'Munsters' at Rue de Bois on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1915 in great detail. This was later painted by Fortunino Matania as 'The Last Absolution of the Munsters at the Rue de Bois 1915'. MacDonagh duly concluded that 'no consideration will deter the Catholic chaplain from administering the last rites to a dying man in the trenches'.<sup>120</sup> In the biography of another chaplain killed at

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<sup>115</sup> Leonard, 'Chaplains', p. 8.

<sup>116</sup> Dungan, *They Shall Grow Not Old*, p. 64

<sup>117</sup> W. Henry, *Galway and the 'Great War'* (Dublin, 2006), p. 202.

<sup>118</sup> P. Clarke and M. Feeny, *Mayo comrades of the Great War*, (Ballina, 2006), p. 267.

<sup>119</sup> MacDonagh, 'Irish Catholic Chaplains', p. 354.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p.359.

Ypres in 1917, Alfred O’Rahilly went even further and claimed Fr. Willie Doyle to be a saint. The biography, titled *Martyr Priest*, had a contribution from General Hickie who said ‘Fr. Doyle was one of the best priests I have ever met and one of the bravest men who have fought or worked out here....he appeared to know no fatigue, he never knew fear’.<sup>121</sup>

The portrait of the Irish Catholic Chaplain as brave, selfless and even saintly suited the British military authorities and the Catholic Church in Britain. These stories of extraordinary bravery helped the Catholic cause in Britain and were used to improve recruitment in Ireland. They were also used to counter anti-war sentiments in the American newspapers. In May 1916 Fr. Bernard Rawlinson wrote to Fr. Gill asking him to provide him with personal experiences of front line chaplains to publish in Irish and American newspapers to aid recruitment. He said he had been asked for this by the ‘Intelligence Dept.’<sup>122</sup> Fr. Gill responded by pointing out that he was opposed to publishing anything relating to his personal experience but he would give the matter ‘his earnest consideration’.<sup>123</sup>

It was important also to stress the unity of the kingdom in the face of war and incidents of friendship between the Irish Catholic chaplain and non-Catholics were

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<sup>121</sup> O’Rahilly, *Martyr Priest*, p. 40.

<sup>122</sup> Fr Gill gives no further details of what he meant by ‘Intelligence Dept.’

H. Gill Papers in Jesuit Archives Dublin (hereafter cited as JAD), File 8.

<sup>123</sup> Rawlinson papers at Downside Abbey (hereafter cited as RP), Box 2, H. Gill to B. Rawlinson, 10 May 1916.

highlighted. At Gallipoli, according to Dungan, relations between Catholic and Protestant padres were superb. Canon McLean was the Anglican chaplain while his Catholic colleague was Fr. Murphy. McLean wrote of Murphy: 'We occupied the same tents; lived in the same dugout and we held our services in the trenches side by side. He was my constant advisor and friend in health and sickness and was always looking after me. The affection I had for him was shared by officers and men of all ranks in the brigade'.<sup>124</sup> Even Lt. Noel Drury, very critical of some Catholic chaplains, noted that Murphy and McLean were 'the only two Padres' we see near the line'.<sup>125</sup>

Douglas Haig, who had a keen interest in the Chaplains' Department, also stressed the importance of unity in the face of the enemy. He told Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, that 'in the field we cannot tolerate any narrow sectarian ideas. We must all be united'.<sup>126</sup> In May 1916 Davidson noted 'a striking instance of the pulling together of padres and officers and their mutual appreciation of one another'.<sup>127</sup> Frederick Spurr noted cooperation between the chaplains. 'They are dressed alike...they confer together, they pray together, they work together. They respect each other, although some of them profoundly differ from each other'.<sup>128</sup> In another case the same writer describes the support given to a Baptist minister by the Catholic chaplain who, amongst other things, had travelled a distance of five miles to tell him about a Baptist soldier who had been

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<sup>124</sup>Dungan, *They Shall Grow Not Old*, p. 70.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>126</sup>Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 98.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>128</sup> T. Johnstone and J. Hagerty, *Cross on the Sword* (London, 1996), p. 106.

killed by a shell and needed burial.<sup>129</sup> An article in the *Catholic Herald* in 1915 claimed there was 'no distinction amongst chaplains to the forces. They work together and help one another'.<sup>130</sup> A Jewish Chaplain was impressed by Haig who, when meeting three chaplains of different denominations, said 'I am glad to see you working so well together as you can help us greatly by teaching the men about the noble cause for which we are fighting'.<sup>131</sup>

However, the 'noble cause for which we are fighting' was often not the cause for which the Irish were fighting. While there were of course Irishmen in regular Irish regiments, there were also three 'New Army' divisions created for the war. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Division there were many men from the Irish Volunteers who were more interested in ensuring that the government's promise of Home Rule was implemented. John Redmond saw the Irish divisions as the basis of a post-war Irish army. In order to encourage recruitment it was vital that the Irishness of these divisions be highlighted as recruitment to the British Army had been declining since the famine and there had been very public anti-recruitment campaigns during the Boer War and in the decade following it.<sup>132</sup>

Redmond's alliance with the Liberals, the crisis of the third Home Rule bill and the eventual passing of the Act, however ambiguous, meant that Nationalist Ireland at the behest of Redmond did, by and large, support the war but there were suspicions in

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p.106.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.106.

<sup>131</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 99.

<sup>132</sup> Denman, 'Red Livery of Shame', p.228.

Nationalist Ireland about Ulster Unionism, whose leaders had voiced pro-German sentiments during the Home Rule crisis.<sup>133</sup> In reality there were deep divisions beneath the surface. Within the Catholic hierarchy there was little unity. Archbishop Walsh of Dublin feared that the Liberal alliance would encourage secularism. Dwyer of Limerick believed that the Liberal government's reliance on John Redmond showed its weakness and questioned its ability to deliver (and, indeed, its commitment to) Home Rule. On the other hand many of the Catholic clergy supported the Irish Party's pro-war stance in 1914 and Catholic priests volunteered for chaplain duty almost from the beginning. As mentioned earlier, Irishmen volunteering for the army saw themselves more as Irish soldiers than British troops and the same was no doubt true for many of the chaplains.

#### The Irish chaplains and National identity

Irish Chaplains felt strongly that they should be attached to Irish regiments. English Catholic chaplains were not considered compatible with Irish troops. Fr. Browne SJ, in a letter to his Provincial in Dublin, noted that two English priests had filled the gap between the death of his Irish predecessor and himself, duly noting that 'both were Englishmen and not really in touch with the men. The second, Fr. Lane-Fox to whose unfortunate accident my appointment is due, was only a fortnight with them and though a distinct improvement on his predecessor-an O:P (Dominican) whom one of the officers described as devilish old at forty-nine- he was handicapped by nationality'.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>134</sup>Browne papers in JAD File 9, F. Browne to Rev. Nolan (Provincial), 15 May 1916.



Fr. Browne was appointed to the second battalion of the Irish Guards, the premier Catholic regiment. Fr. Lane-Fox had been wounded in a bomb throwing accident. The bomb exploded prematurely killing the Colonel, Lord Desmond Fitzgerald. The new CO introduced himself to Fr. Browne with the words 'you are the man we have been wishing for since Fr. Gwynn's death, we have been wishing for an Irishman and a Jesuit'. When Fr. Browne pointed out that his appointment was temporary he was told 'if you only make good with the men it will be permanent.'<sup>135</sup> Significantly, Fr. Lane-Fox was in fact a highly regarded chaplain and, according to Patrick McGill, he was loved by the London Irish before being sent to the Irish Guards. In *The Big Push*, McGill says 'often at night the sentry on watch can see a dark form between the lines working with a shovel and spade burying the dead... its old Fr. Lane-Fox the sentry will mutter, he'll be killed one of these fine days'.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, Lane-Fox was recommended for a Military Cross which he was eventually awarded, and was also recommended for the Medaille Militaire for his ministrations to the battalion in the field after the battle of Loos, where the London Irish famously kicked a football during a charge on the German trenches. If Monsignor Keatinge unsympathetically referred to his later accident as 'fooling around with bombs',<sup>137</sup> Fr. Lane-Fox was not regarded as suitable for the Irish Guards by Fr. Browne and nor, if he is to be believed, by the CO of the Irish Guards. Browne was anxious of course to remain with what he himself described as 'the crack Catholic regiment'<sup>138</sup> and in this he was supported by Fr. Knapp another Jesuit who referred to Fr Lane-Fox as 'an absolute wreck'

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> P. McGill, *The Big Push* (London, 1916), p. 183.

<sup>137</sup> Johnstone and Hagerty, *Cross on the Sword*, p. 129.

<sup>138</sup> Browne papers in JAD, File 9, F. Browne to Rev. Nolan (Provincial), 15 April 1916.

in a letter to Rawlinson on March 17<sup>th</sup> 1917. He even complained that Fr. Lane-Fox did not spend enough time in the hospital recovering from his wounds. Knapp suggested Rawlinson remove him but Rawlinson was reluctant to do so saying that it would 'be better if Fr. Lane-Fox decided that for himself'.<sup>139</sup>

Fr. Browne spent a lot of time with the Irish Guards but, when Lane-Fox did in fact go, he was replaced by a Fr. F du M Braune, an Englishman. Fr. Browne, writing to his provincial again, reiterated his view that the Irish Guards needed an Irish chaplain. 'I told [Rawlinson] that I know the men want an Irish priest. I have heard it so often and from so many quarters to have any doubt of it....I honestly think that no one but an Irishman should be posted to the Irish Guards'.<sup>140</sup> This view was supported by another Jesuit, Fr. Henry Gill, in a letter to his Fr. Provincial in Dublin in 1914 in which he said 'I think it would be well if your Rev. and Cardinal Logue were to make it clear that we are to be with Irish soldiers. I say this as it appears that English Chaplains have been waiting to get with the Irish and of course they couldn't do anything of the kind'.<sup>141</sup> Fr. James McRory went much further in his criticism of English priests than Frs. Browne and Gill. McRory himself was from Derry but served in the Connaught Rangers. He was wounded at Passchendaele, in 1917 and transferred to Mesopotamia. He was very critical of many aspects of the war effort. He reiterated that only Catholic chaplains were allowed up to the front line but suggested that it was only *Irish* Catholic priests who were seen there. 'If you met a priest, invariably he was Irish, the others looked for safe quarters and Catholics might die like

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<sup>139</sup>R.P. Box 2, S. Knapp to B. Rawlinson, 17 March 1917.

<sup>140</sup> Browne papers in JAD, File 9, F. Browne to Rev. Nolan (Provincial) 9 November 1917.

<sup>141</sup> Gill papers in JAD Box 21 to Rev. Nolan (Provincial), c. December 1914.

pagans'.<sup>142</sup> He went on to name Irish priests, who he saw as brave and hardworking, contrasting them to English priests, whom he deemed to be cowardly and lazy. In the case of the Connaught Rangers, the first battalion had Fr. Peale SJ, an Irish priest, zealous, energetic and 'a true type of Irish priest', while the second had Fr. Dey who was 'Lazy, cowardly and indifferent about his duties to Catholic soldiers in wartime'.<sup>143</sup> He went on to suggest that Fr. Dey quoted Kitchener's order regarding chaplains not going to the front line, thus 'neglecting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Connaughts and other Catholics in the firing line. Cowardice was the real cause... these priests are Ireland's bitterest enemies.'<sup>144</sup> He was also unimpressed with Rawlinson and Keatinge. Rawlinson, he claimed, was acting chaplain to 18<sup>th</sup> (Royal Irish Regiment) but avoided duty in the firing line: 'He is paid by the public to do priest's duty and he avoids it, he acts as a kind of staff officer to Monsignor Keatinge [*sic*] –cowardly English priests... these mongrels are unfit to be chaplains to brave Irish soldiers'.<sup>145</sup> His opinion of Keatinge was little better. He claimed that Keatinge kept four priests at his headquarters at St. Omer, 'idling their time' when they were needed at the battle of Hooge.<sup>146</sup> He went on to add that it was reported to him that later, in Salonika, Keatinge was as 'lazy and neglectful of Catholics as he was in France'. By contrast he praised the bravery of Irish priests in Mesopotamia who he said were volunteers and not commissioned chaplains. The ones deserving of praise were, of course, Irish- Fr Lenehan of Cork, and Fr Farrell of Meath. He also praised Fr. Divine of the Connaught Rangers.

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<sup>142</sup>McRory Papers in Public Record Office Northern Ireland (hereafter cited as PRONI), Diary Book 1, p.57

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p.60.

<sup>145</sup>McRory Papers at PRONI, Diary Book 2, p. 50.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

Johnstone and Hagerty dismiss McRory for 'hearsay gossip,..... racially inspired observations on, and criticism of, senior chaplains, bishops and a cardinal... Historically it is worthless except as a sad study of how a mind can be warped by wounds or campaigning hardship'.<sup>147</sup> Jane Leonard also criticised his bigotry in her essay on Irish chaplains. However, this criticism of McRory is a little severe and may well be inaccurate. His diary begins in 1914 and the tone is intemperate throughout. He was not wounded until Passchendaele in 1917. His criticism of English Chaplains is severe but Fr. Gill and Fr. Browne likewise felt that they were unsuitable for Irish regiments.

Moreover his attacks on Keatinge and Rawlinson were similar to comments made by an Irish Franciscan, Fr. Bradley. In 1915 he wrote to Fr. John A. Jackman, a friend and a senior Franciscan, 'Cardinal Bour[n]e came for a bit of advertisement to this country. The King came to see his troops, yes, Card[i]nal must come to[o] to 'the front', but he always kept a days journey from the range of German guns. I'm sorry his cowardly heart would not permit him to come here.....this is not a safe place for a coward.'<sup>148</sup> In another letter of October 1915 Bradley sounded remarkably similar to McRory when he said: 'It is in these times that true Irish Catholicism is seen. What a contrast to others who call themselves Catholics. They resemble more pagan dogs that are not worth whistling on than Catholics'.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Johnstone and Hagerty, *Cross on the Sword*, p. 148.

<sup>148</sup> P. Bradley's papers at Franciscan Archives, Killiney, Co. Dublin, P. Bradley to B. Jackman, 12 February, 1915.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

Raising and maintaining the morale of the troops was a vital part of the chaplain's remit and some Irish chaplains emphasised the 'Irishness' of their troops in an attempt to maintain morale, often in a way which might have been frowned on. This 'Irishness' was often indistinguishable from Irish Nationalism and while this might not be surprising in the case of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division, which was recruited partly from the Irish Volunteers, it was also present in regular regiments like the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters. MacDonagh noted the presence in the 2nd Munsters of 'green flags with Irish harps' (harps without the Crown, an emblem which Kitchener found offensive) or with the word 'Munster' embroidered on them.<sup>150</sup> Fr. Gleeson described in his diary the four (unofficial) company flags of the Munsters: 'We hung out our four beautiful green flags, dark green with a golden harp in the centre and Munster underneath, the tricolour with the sacred heart in the centre'.<sup>151</sup> He does not describe the other two flags. These flags were used in the attack at Aubers Ridge on 9 May 1915 which resulted in very heavy casualties for the Munsters: 'Then over the parapet, like one man leapt 800 forms, the four green company flags leading.....hundreds of Munsters fell in the charge but the green flag was raised on the parapet of the main German trench and in they went'.<sup>152</sup> Rowland Feilding, an English officer serving with the Connaught Rangers, wrote that, after one church parade, 'one of my Companies has produced an enormous green flag with a yellow Irish harp upon it..... It had not got the Crown, and therefore would be ranked by some people as 'Sinn Fein', I feel sure'.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> MacDonagh, 'Catholic Chaplains', p. 354.

<sup>151</sup> F. Gleeson papers at Archdiocese of Dublin Archives (hereafter cited as ADA), Diary, May 9 1915.

<sup>152</sup> MacDonagh, 'Catholic Chaplains', p. 357.

<sup>153</sup> R. Feilding, *War Letters to a Wife* (Staplehurst, 2001), p. 109.

Fr. Doyle also used the Irish past to raise the morale of his troops before the battle of Passchendaele in 1917. His homily on that occasion recalled the celebrated Irish Brigade in the service of the kings of France in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a unit that had some notable successes against English forces. Doyle managed to connect the historic brigade with the Irishmen who were now about to go into battle. Rather than emphasising the fact that they were British troops, he dwelt on the support they were giving the French, and particularly the Belgians, in fighting the invading Germans. He managed to link the patriotism of the Irish Brigade to that of the modern Irish Party in such a skilful way that General Hickie said 'he was intensely pleased with the way in which 'dangerous' topics had been handled without offending anyone'.<sup>154</sup>

The heritage of the Irish Brigade was widely discussed in Ireland as an aid to recruitment and even Kipling, who had lent his poetic talents to the anti-Home Rule Unionists during the Third Home Rule crisis, recalled the glories of the Irish Brigade and saw a link between it and the Irish Guards. It is noteworthy that Kipling's son John served with the Irish Guards and was killed at Loos. In a poem of 1918 he wrote:

We're not so old in the Army List,  
But we're not so new in the ring,  
For we carried our packs with Marshal Saxe  
When Louis was our King.  
But Douglas Haig's our Marshal now  
And we're King George's men,  
And after one hundred and seventy years  
We're fighting for France again!

*Ah, France! And did we stand by you,  
Then life was made splendid with gifts and rewards?*

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<sup>154</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 105.

*Ah, France! And will we deny you  
In the hour of your agony, Mother of Swords?*<sup>155</sup>

Furthermore, MacDonagh quoted Gleeson as saying:

It is true to say that in us the Munsters they [the French People] recognise the children of the men who fought at Fontenoy and Landen. They know that we are old, old friends indeed.... moved by the memories of the Irish Catholic brigade in the service of France from the fall of the Stuarts in England to the fall of the Bourbons in France, the French people recognise the distinct and separate nationality of the Irish Regiments. We are 'les Irlandais' and not 'les Anglais'... our flags have done that.<sup>156</sup>

#### The problems with non-Catholic officers and concerns about discrimination

Irish Catholic Chaplains were proud of their 'boys' and of their Irishness and of their Catholicism and many of them were angered at what they perceived to be the slighting of their men by the British military establishment. Fr. McRory felt that there was a bias against Irish troops and in particular against Irish Catholic troops. As early as 1915 he commented on the lack of Catholic officers in a battalion of the Leinster Regiment, four of their officers were Catholic, eleven were Protestant yet 'all the "Leinsters" are Catholic apart from about six Protestants and some of those are corporals and one a sergeant'.<sup>157</sup> He went on to complain that the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers had no Catholic officer even

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<sup>155</sup> R. Kipling, 'Irish Guards' (London, 1918), p. 77.

<sup>156</sup> MacDonagh, 'Irish Catholic Chaplains', p. 355.

<sup>157</sup> McRory Papers at PRONI, Diary Book 1, p. 38.

though it was a Catholic regiment and that, in the [Royal] Irish Regiment (which he referred to as the 18<sup>th</sup>, using the old regimental number ) which was ‘absolutely Catholic’, there was only one Catholic officer ‘if he be still alive’.<sup>158</sup> Again, it is easy to write off Mac Rory as a bigot and his information as being of little value, but there were instances where Catholic chaplains were made to feel unwelcome in certain Irish regiments. On 27 October 1915, Fr. Keane wrote to Keatinge regarding insulting behaviour in an officers’ mess of the Irish Rifles by a Major Lloyd. There were four Catholic officers present. Lloyd said that ‘the Catholic faith was a masquerade and that I was a damned Catholic and that my service is a damned Mass... no Catholic would ever command this regiment; and that Catholic officers could all follow their priest and go’. The letter went on to point out that Lloyd was usually under the influence of drink when he made such regular comments. He also objected to the celebration of the Mass and threatened to ‘send Protestant soldiers to break it up’. Keane pointed out that 80% of the men were Catholic as were seven of the officers.<sup>159</sup>

This was not an isolated case, however, and on 9 July Fr. Simon Knapp wrote to Rawlinson, saying he was glad that the RIR had a Catholic chaplain as the two previous commanding officers would not tolerate it at all. ‘The first wouldn’t have it and the second unfortunately was present when I broached the subject with the first and considered the matter settled’.<sup>160</sup> In later correspondence from Keane to Rawlinson (April 1916), Keane suggested Lloyd was cashiered, yet in November 1916, Fr. Murphy of Royal Irish Rifles was complaining to Rawlinson of the dilution of the Royal Irish Rifles with Protestant

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>159</sup> RP, Box 2, M. Keane to B. Rawlinson, 27 October 1915.

<sup>160</sup> RP, Box 2, S. Knapp to B. Rawlinson, 9 July 1915.



Londoners and complains of the bigotry of Col. Lloyd who, he says, 'went to the 'Brigade' to have 'steps taken not to have the chaplain as the 'Rifles' was no longer R.C.'<sup>161</sup> Similar hostility was encountered by Fr. Devas of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division who wrote to Rawlinson on 30 July 1917, requesting transfer to another unit (he was with no. 7 Field Ambulance). He mentioned to Rawlinson that there was a battalion whose men were mostly Catholics but the chaplain is Church of England: 'The CO and the officers are all Protestant and clearly let me know that I am not welcome there'.<sup>162</sup>

While MacDonagh, a keen supporter of Irish involvement in the war, was highlighting the great contribution of Irish chaplains to the war effort, some Irish Catholic chaplains felt that their contribution and that of their flock was very much unappreciated and undervalued. McRory believed that Irish soldiers were not getting due recognition for their sacrifices which were sometimes very costly. In the case of the Irish Guards, he mentioned that, by the end of 1914, out of 1600 men only 130 were left and out of 35 officers, none was left: 'When desperate fighting is to be done, the true value of Irish soldiers are remembered but when rewards are to be given and promotions granted, how few Irish Catholics receive them'.<sup>163</sup> He also complained that, in the King's Birthday Honours in 1915, there were no rewards for the RIR but that the Rifle Brigade got seventy. The 18<sup>th</sup> [Royal Irish Fusiliers] got two compared to a Scotch regiment which got eight. He went on to say that, on 28 May 1915, the Warwicks failed to aid the Dublin Fusiliers during a chlorine gas attack at Wieltje and that the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had

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<sup>161</sup> RP, Box 2, Fr. Murphy to B. Rawlinson, 12 Nov 1916.

<sup>162</sup> RP, Box 2, R. Devas to B. Rawlinson, 30 July 1917.

<sup>163</sup> McRory papers at PRONI, Diary, Book 1, p. 38.

run from the trenches. Only Capt. Leighly and twenty-five men survived. They were not rewarded nor mentioned: 'If you were not an Irishman and if your twenty-five survivors of the Dublins were not Catholics, there would be special mention of you and the heroic Dublins in dispatches'.<sup>164</sup>

Other chaplains also suggested that Irish troops were not being given credit for their achievements. Fr. Gill, in a letter to Fr. Nolan in Dublin on 17 June 1915, wrote about the 'valour of Irish troops' and added, 'this was at a time when never a word was said about Irish regiments'.<sup>165</sup> In a later observation contained in some typed notes, he talked about a gas attack in which an Irish battalion had been almost destroyed and had held their ground when others gave way, 'yet not a word of praise did they get'. Later on, he read in Conan Doyle's *British Campaigns in France and Flanders* an account of the same gas attack 'evidently compiled from official sources. Credit is given to others who did less well but never a word about the Irish. It was the kind of thing which completed the former bungling and deceit in the whole Irish dealings with the government'.<sup>166</sup> In March 1916, he wrote that his boys attacked and took a trench, capturing 125 German Guards prisoner. 'A well known correspondent of the Daily [ - ] referred to 'a good piece of work by the North countrymen'.<sup>167</sup> Fr. Bradley of the Franciscans wrote in October 1915, 'I know the Irish are being neglected in my absence' ; in the same letter he pointed out that

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid. p.38.

<sup>165</sup> Gill papers in JAD, Box 21, H. Gill to Rev. Nolan ( Provincial), 17 May 1915.

<sup>166</sup> Gill papers in JAD, Box 21, H. Gill's typed notes.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

‘the Irish have done wonders in this war but little is said about it’.<sup>168</sup> Many of these comments were supported by Redmond in a speech to the Commons in 1916 in which he suggested that the failure to recognise the deeds of the Irish soldiers was a contributory factor to the Easter Rising.

Irish Catholic chaplains claimed that they encountered hostility because of their nationality even within the Catholic community and especially after 1916. Shortly after the Easter Rising, a Fr. Phelan was removed when a report was sent to Cardinal Bourne regarding his language. One Fr. Hegarty raised the matter with Fr. Phelan who admitted using words like ‘damn’ and ‘blast’ in company during dinner. ‘The feelings against the Irish were pretty high on account of the recent rebellion, he used these words when he heard the comment [that] the Irish are vermin and the scum of the earth’<sup>169</sup> In July 1918 a letter to a senior civil servant named Monk, who was the Permanent Under Secretary at the War Office, highlighted the problems of an Irish priest in Norfolk. Fr. T.E. Maguire wrote asking to be transferred to an American or Irish regiment or to be sent overseas. He argued ‘that no good work can be done amongst such narrow-minded clergy and R.C. civilians as I had experience of coming across in Norfolk. I never knew selfishness and petty jealousies could be carried so far.’ He complained that Rev. Byrne Coslessy of Norwich claimed he was pro-German. Maguire went on to say ‘I am an enthusiastic lover of my country but I vehemently protest against being called pro-German’.<sup>170</sup> Presumably

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<sup>168</sup> P. Bradley’s papers at Franciscan archives, Killiney, Co. Dublin, 13 October 1915.

<sup>169</sup> RP, Box 2, Fr. Hegarty to B. Rawlinson, 20 November, 1916.

<sup>170</sup> RP, Box 5, Fr. Maguire to PUS, July 7 1918.

Maguire's views on Ireland in the aftermath of the rising upset both the Catholic clergy and faithful of Norfolk.

Such animosity could be on both sides, however, and there are several complaints from Catholic chaplains about sharing facilities with their Protestant opposite numbers and often, too, questioning the value of the work they did. Fr. Browne, writing to Nolan in August 1916, made the following observation:

Our confreres are of course more leisured. Sunday is their busy day except those who take charge of the canteens but that is not strictly ministerial work, is it?... there is little they can do –my companion with the 1<sup>st</sup> brigade comes up to the trenches and has regular services with the brigade. His only grievance is that I am treated better than he is. You priests are alright, you have a home with a regiment wherever it goes, we have to look for shelter if we come up near the front, they leave us with the ambulances.<sup>171</sup>

In another case a Fr. Ryan, who was serving as a hospital chaplain, refused to allow an Anglican clergyman to conduct services in a hospital ward where there were Catholic patients. He justified this position by claiming that such services 'could unduly tax and exclude some if not all such patients quite apart from the effect on nurses who are not Protestants having to listen to services they do not approve of and which mark them out as the only Catholics in the ward'. He went on to complain 'some reverend gentleman.....has already complained of my placing Catholic prayer books in the lobby of

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<sup>171</sup> Browne papers in JAD, File 9, F. Browne to Rev. Nolan (Provincial), 21 August 1916.

the hospital.’<sup>172</sup> Haig’s hope that chaplains of all denominations show a united front was further confounded as Catholic chaplains were reluctant to allow Protestant clergymen to use Catholic churches in France for their services. In September 1916, Fr. Devas of the Royal Irish Fusiliers wrote to Rawlinson requesting advice on allowing Anglicans to use a ruined R.C. church in Ypres for their service. He himself believed that it was not at all acceptable. In a reply, Rawlinson agreed that it was not acceptable but that ‘in a ruined place like Ypres, there is no need to make a fuss’.<sup>173</sup>

Michael MacDonagh’s comment that Belgium and France had ‘never felt the blight of German Lutheranism which in Great Britain disported faith and worship of the play of imaginative beauty of expression’<sup>174</sup> conveys a sense of the disdainful attitude of some Irish Catholic chaplains towards Britain and their contrasting affinity with Catholic France and Flanders. As we have already seen, thirty-seven Tipperary priests were educated at the Irish College in Paris in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the Irish language was on the curriculum. We have also noted how the heritage of ‘the Wild Geese’, who had fought for Bourbon France in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was recalled and used by Irish Nationalist MP’s to aid Irish recruitment. It was not all, however, simply a ruse to gain support for the war effort, as there is no doubt that Irish Catholics did see a strong link between themselves and Catholic Europe. MacDonagh pointed out that in Belgium and France the Irish soldier found himself in an environment ‘as powerfully religious as even

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<sup>172</sup> RP, Box 2, F. Ryan to B. Rawlinson, 28 September 1915.

<sup>173</sup> RP, Box 2, P. Devas to B. Rawlinson and B. Rawlinson to P. Devas, September 1916.

<sup>174</sup> M. MacDonagh, ‘Catholic Background of the War’, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 8, 1916, pp. 241-252, at p.244

that of his own intensely Catholic home'.<sup>175</sup> He went on to note Mass bells, the Angelus, people making the sign of the cross and the beautiful cathedrals; what is more, 'The priest is frequently seen going through the villages in surplice and stole, his hands crossed upon his breast, preceded by an acolyte ringing a bell; and the villagers know that the Viaticum is being carried to a dying soul'.<sup>176</sup>

There were other connections too, especially to battle-scarred Ypres. Both McRory and MacDonagh refer to the Irish convent there. John Redmond's family also had connections with Ypres and Redmond women had traditionally joined the Benedictine nuns there. These included John Redmond's niece. In particular, McRory referred to the 'Irish Flag' hanging in the convent. The convent was known as Les Dames Irlandaises and seems to have been established by James II. Although an allied victory, the battle of Ramillies in 1706 did see the Irish Brigade attack and defeat two British regiments, probably a Scottish regiment in Dutch service and Churchill's English regiment. Their flags were given to the Irish nuns in Ypres and, according to Fr. Gill, they also left the flag of Clare's Dragoons there too. The Nationalist writer Thomas Davis, writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mentions the flags in two poems. In 'Clare's Dragoons' he wrote:

The flags we captured in the fray  
Look lone in Ypres Choir they say.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>177</sup> 'Clare's' Dragoons' (1843).

Later, in another poem, 'The Flower of Finae', he wrote:

In the Cloisters of Ypres a banner is swaying.  
And by it a pale weeping maiden is praying;  
That flag's the sole trophy of Ramillies fray;  
This nun is poor Eily, the Flower of Finae.<sup>178</sup>

What became of the captured flags subsequently is not known, but in Irish Nationalist lore, the story of the flag of Clare's Dragoons in the convent at Ypres was well-known. Fr. Henry Gill searched for it amongst the rubble of the Benedictine convent of Les Dames Irlandaises on three occasions during the war. On the last occasion, he reported 'it must be remembered that during all this period shells were falling in the town and at least on one occasion when I was in the cellar shells actually struck the building'.<sup>179</sup> Even after that experience, he wrote to the Mother Abbess (now living with her congregation in England) asking about the flag and she wrote back detailing exactly where it was hidden along with other treasures including an 'old English martyrologie given by Thomas Moore with his signature on the first page. This book is small and very old'.<sup>180</sup> Gill did not find the flag and, after a long investigation, he concluded it had been destroyed in the shelling.

Besides connections with Ypres, Fr. Gill had studied at Louvain and was appalled at its destruction; indeed, there was revulsion throughout Catholic Ireland, mainly due to the

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<sup>178</sup> 'Flower of Finae' (1844).

<sup>179</sup> Henry Gill, 'The fate of the Irish flag at Ypres', *Studies*, March 1919, pp.119-128.

<sup>180</sup> H. Gill papers in JAD, Box 21, Mother Abbess (Mary Mauma) to H. Gill, 8 June 1915. Moore is usually spelt More.

destruction of the Irish Franciscan College there. Gill might well have been considered part of the Irish elite as his father had been a Nationalist Parnellite MP and, later on, an important publisher in Dublin. Another Irish Party MP, Tom Kettle, was in Belgium in August 1914, buying arms for the Irish Volunteers. He was so appalled at German the atrocities he witnessed that he gave the guns to the Belgian Government and returned to Ireland where he joined the army, despite being unsuitable for health reasons, and encouraged others to join too. Prior to his return he remained in Belgium for two months as war correspondent for the *Daily News*. In this role, he brought his legal training to bear and investigated atrocity stories. When the Germans invaded Belgium, the revulsion caused in Ireland was real; there was a genuine sense of outrage at the plight of the Belgian people. As Peseta has pointed out, 'The effects of 'rape of Belgium' in Irish opinion has been underestimated and under-explored'.<sup>181</sup> Fr. Henry Gill himself wrote in the *Irish Monthly* in August-September 1914: 'Louvain is destroyed- destroyed by an act of ruthless soldiery. Could any cause, could any excuse, we ask ourselves, justify such a deed?'<sup>182</sup>

Irish connections were not just to Belgium. There was an identification in Ireland with Catholic Europe, often as opposed to Protestant Britain. During the centenary celebrations of the birth of Daniel O'Connell, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Peter Paul Mc Swiney, invited Catholic notables from across Europe. These included the Bishop of Nantes, Viscount O'Neill de Tyrone (Prefect of the Seine) and Prince Radziwill. O'Connell himself had been educated in Paris and his son had served in the Austrian Army. It was

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<sup>181</sup> Peseta, 'Thomas Kettle', p. 10

<sup>182</sup> H. Gill, 'Louvain and Ireland', *Studies*, September 1914, pp.292-95 at p.292.



the Austrians who had inspired, organised and supported the St. Patrick Brigade in defence of the Papal States in 1860 and Mary Jane Cryan Pancani claims that 'it was Austrian officers of Irish descent who gave the impetus to form the Irish Brigade for the Papal Army and who were responsible for the military organisation of this unit'.<sup>183</sup> Given its Catholic credentials, Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick was worried during the war about the collapse of the Hapsburg empire and the destruction of Europe's last Catholic Great Power.<sup>184</sup>

### The difficulties with some chaplains

Irish chaplains at the Front did not always conform to the Fr. McRory type, as an examination of the Rawlinson correspondence confirms. Some chaplains simply did not fit into the officers' messes where they were expected to be. Many Irish priests were not sympathetic to Britain's war effort and differed in education and class to many British officers. This was particularly true in the early part of the war. As noted earlier, a high proportion of Irish priests had some political involvement, often in Nationalist or agrarian politics, and might have found the mess an uncomfortable place to be in. Some clearly made themselves objectionable. In August 1916, Fr. Knapp wrote to Rawlinson complaining about a Fr. Walsh: 'I'm afraid Fr. Walsh was not a success. I knew he had not made a good impression on the brigade staff and the general said he made himself

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<sup>183</sup> M. Cryan-Pancan, 'New Light on the Background of the Irish participation in the Papal army of 1860', *Irish Sword*, 16, 1986, pp. 155-65, at p 155.

<sup>184</sup> P. Maume, *Long Gestation* (Dublin, 1999), p. 166.

RP, Box 5, S. Knapp to B. Rawlinson, 11 August 1916.

disliked by all the officers with whom he had been in contact'. In a later letter from Rawlinson to Knapp, Rawlinson told Knapp: 'If the work of Fr. Butler is not satisfactory, warn him about it and if it does not improve; report the matter to me'.<sup>185</sup>

There are also some specific references to Irish chaplains not attending to the pastoral needs of the men. Often complaints such as these came from relatives in Britain or Ireland who complained to Rawlinson about the lack of spiritual care for their relations. Chaplains also complained about the shortcomings of their colleagues. In February 1916, Rawlinson wrote to Fr. Gill in response to a complaint he had made regarding the lack of pastoral care in the 8<sup>th</sup> Surreys. Gill had claimed that the 8<sup>th</sup> Surreys had not had a church parade in three months. However, Rawlinson wrote back to Gill giving the example of 'one boy in [the battalion] who has been able to go to communion and confession nearly every week when not in action'.<sup>186</sup> The East Surreys, although not, of course, an Irish regiment, was viewed with affection in Dublin where it was posted during the Lock Out of 1913. It was often on guard at coal yards where its soldiers seemed curiously unable to prevent Dublin women from taking coal. As a largely London regiment, the sympathy of the men seems to have been with the strikers. When it left Dublin, crowds lined the route to the docks in a great send off.

There were, on occasions, problems of discipline with Irish chaplains. Fr. Coughlan of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inniskillings wrote to Rawlinson in September 1916 complaining about the behaviour and lack of cooperation of some of his colleagues. He said that 'a chaplain

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<sup>185</sup> RP Box 5, B. Rawlinson to S. Knapp, 8 January 1917.

<sup>186</sup> RP, Box 5, B. Rawlinson to H. Gill, 24 February 1916.

appealed to the military lay authorities against arrangements made by me as senior chaplain in the interests of the spiritual welfare of the division'<sup>187</sup> The chaplain about whom the complaint was made (a Fr. Kelly) also, according to Coughlan, refused to obey orders when asked to look after the 2nd Inniskillings when their own chaplain became unwell. He also apparently went on leave with another priest (a Fr. Mosse) without bothering to consult Fr Coughlan, the senior chaplain. Fr. Mosse too was criticised by Coughlan because 'his conversations and mode of life are of such a nature as to be a cause of scandal to the people, civilian and military, among whom he associates and who know him to be a Catholic priest'. Among his misdemeanours were 'omission of mass on weekdays- and that, on at least one occasion, he allowed the burial service of a Catholic soldier to be taken by a military layman'.<sup>188</sup> On 11 October Mosse resigned. Another chaplain causing problems in 1918 was Fr. Kilduff who 'escaped from England, spent some days in Rouen in hospital and is now regaling in the South of France... he is perfectly useless out here.'<sup>189</sup> In response, the PUS wrote to Rawlinson 'just now we are overflowing with "crock" RC chaplains'.<sup>190</sup>

Clearly, some priests did not 'fit in'. This is not really surprising as their backgrounds were very different to those of the officers they encountered, at least in the early years of the war. Fr Mullins of the RIR noted that one of his chaplains did not 'have the same pull' as his predecessor with the authorities and [did] not get on well with the

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<sup>187</sup> RP, Box 5F, Coughlan to B. Rawlinson, 28 September 1916.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> RP, Box 6, B. Rawlinson to A Monk 21 June, 1918.

<sup>190</sup> RP, Box 6, PUS to B. Rawlinson, 24 June 1918.

CO of 21<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery.’<sup>191</sup> In October 1918 a Fr. Nolan was regarded as ‘not suitable because of temperament... he was not wanted at the units he was sent to and not regarded as a suitable chaplain’.<sup>192</sup> Other unsuitable chaplains were mentioned by Fr. Gill in a letter to his provincial as early as December 1914. In a postscript marked ‘personal’ he said ‘ I am very much shamed and humiliated to find out that two of the new chaplains- I believe from Cardinal Logue’s diocese- had got into trouble on the way out and were practically under arrest waiting to be sent back. They had been reported by four separate witnesses... it is a pity that more care was not exercised in selecting men’<sup>193</sup>. Problems with chaplains again surfaced in letters from the Jesuit provincial in Dublin, Fr. Nolan, to Fr. Page in Flanders. It is clear that Nolan had received a complaint from a relation of a Catholic officer claiming that Fr. Page was not performing his duty correctly. The relative claimed that Fr. Page had not been seen and that it was necessary to go to a French priest for confession: ‘He is not doing his duty as it ought to be done’.<sup>194</sup> Fr. Page’s letter to Nolan was very defensive. He pointed out that he was responsible for an area of 200 square miles and that he had to travel twenty miles, while fasting on a Sunday, to hear confession, say two masses and preach.<sup>195</sup> Page, however, may have had other concerns. His parents had been in Brussels in August 1914 during the German invasion and had been living behind German lines ever since. Both survived the war but conditions

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<sup>191</sup> RP, Box 5, N. Mullins to B. Rawlinson, c. November 1916.

<sup>192</sup> RP, Box 6, Note in Rawlinson papers October 1918 regarding the suitability of J. Nolan.

<sup>193</sup> Gill papers, JAD, Box 21, H. Gill to Rev. Nolan (Provincial), 10 December 1914.

<sup>194</sup> Page Papers, JAD, File 25, Anon. to Rev. Nolan (Provincial) regarding Fr. Page, 12 April 1917.

<sup>195</sup> Page Papers, JAD File 25, Fr. Page to Nolan, 22 April 1917.

were very hard in the occupied part of Belgium. Fr. Page was no doubt very concerned about their welfare throughout the war.

Some chaplains volunteered for front line duty with the highest of motives but, despite their best intentions, were sometimes physically or mentally unsuited to the work. In July 1916 Fr. Wrafter wrote to Nolan regarding a Fr. Maher. Maher had attracted the attention of the police in England and had, on occasions, been collected by them from various places. Wrafter said in his correspondence that Maher had 'a bad police report'; in fact, it appeared that Fr. Maher was 'physically and mentally unfit for duty'.<sup>196</sup> Ironically, Fr. Wrafter himself was considered too old for front line duty and, in 1918, he was transferred to Scheveningen POW camp in Holland to administer to British prisoners of war. He was not too pleased with his transfer and would have preferred to remain as an army chaplain. Writing to Nolan in Dublin, he complained about the Chaplains' Department, suggesting that it was 'simply hopeless'.<sup>197</sup> Wrafter's complaints were examined at a higher level and, presumably, the Irish Jesuits made their feelings plain in other quarters because Rawlinson wrote to Monk regarding the problems related to the transfer of Fr. Wrafter. Rawlinson told Monk that he had 'a letter from Bishop Bidwell telling me that the Irish Jesuits were annoyed about it and asking me to suggest another man'.<sup>198</sup> Despite these interventions, Fr. Wrafter was, nonetheless transferred to Holland.

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<sup>196</sup> Wrafter Papers, JAD, File 26, Wrafter to Rev. Nolan (Provincial), 6 July 1916.

<sup>197</sup> Wrafter Papers at JAD, file 26 Wrafter to Rev. Nolan (Provincial), 27 June 1916.

<sup>198</sup> RP, Box 6, B. Rawlinson to Monk, 21 June 1918.

Work at the front was demanding and there are several accounts of chaplains who found it difficult to cope with work in the front line. Most of the Irish chaplains had no military experience and, no doubt, the high death toll and injury rates were very upsetting. In April 1915 Rawlinson wrote to Monk regarding a Fr. Cagney, a Limerick Redemptorist who was sent home because he was unsuitable due to his 'nervous temperament'. Later, a Fr. Cossins applied for a transfer from the front line because it was too stressful for him. Fr. Knapp, writing to Rawlinson, observed that Cossins 'had been taking it easy since he had sent in his request'.<sup>199</sup> Even Fr. Gleeson of the Munsters eventually found it impossible to function in the front line. Gleeson had famously blessed the Munsters before the battle of Aubers Ridge and was very upset because of the death toll in the attack. It was further reported that Gleeson had participated in the defence of a trench against a German counter-attack. In a diary entry for June 1915 he seemed very upset due to the tragic letters he received from home: 'The tragedy of these letters... one letter was from a broken-hearted girl who lost an heroic sweetheart. His death has almost driven her insane!! Then the Mothers oh---.... .' In October 1915, Gleeson wrote to Rawlinson asking to be released: 'I am sorry to be leaving the dear old Munster lads but I cannot stand it any longer. I love the poor men ever so much'.<sup>200</sup> In December 1915, Gleeson wrote to Keatinge thanking him for 'getting me back to civilian life'.<sup>201</sup> However, he later decided to return to the army and asked Archbishop Walsh of Dublin for permission.

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<sup>199</sup> RP box 5, B Rawlinson to S Knapp Dec. 1916 and S Knapp to B.Rawlinson , 1 Jan. 1916.

<sup>200</sup> RP.box 4, F. Gleeson to B Rawlinson, 14 Oct. 1915,

<sup>201</sup>RP, box 4, F. Gleeson to W.Keating, Dec.1915.

Significantly, Archbishop Walsh was mystified by the workings of the Chaplains' Department and was very surprised that there appeared to be no common term for enlistment. Gleeson had asked Walsh for permission to go back to the army as a chaplain for one year. Walsh had pointed out that there seemed to be little consistency regarding the time chaplains had to sign up for ' J. Dunlea was expected to sign up for two years which is unacceptable , D. Mc Grath was told he had to sign up indefinitely'<sup>202</sup>. Walsh consequently suggested that an *Episcopus Castrensis* would be a good idea. This is hardly surprising as Irish bishops were, on the whole, unhappy with the Archbishop of Westminster's role in the appointment of all Catholic chaplains. Walsh also believed that not all Irish dioceses were pulling their weight in providing chaplains, a reference to the diocese of Limerick which provided no secular clergy at all. There, Bishop O'Dwyer was totally opposed to the war effort. While there were differences in the number of chaplains each diocese provided, there were those within the priesthood to whom the Great War was an irrelevance at best. There were many who, like Bishop O'Dwyer, actively opposed the war. Given the background of many of the priests, it is not surprising that they had anti-British sympathies. It seems, however, that it was the younger priests who gave most support to Irish separatists. Furthermore, there were many priests of the regular clergy involved with 'advanced nationalism' and even army chaplains like Fr. Gleeson condoned and supported the flying of Irish tricolours in the trenches.

To clearly understand the role of the chaplain, it is necessary to look at the views of General, later Field Marshal, Haig who asserted that 'No one could do more than a chaplain to sustain morale and explain what our empire is fighting for'. He also urged

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<sup>202</sup> RP box 5, From Walshe to Gleeson, 4 March 1917

Bishop Gwynne, the senior Anglican chaplain on the Western Front, to dismiss chaplains who were lacking in what he called 'spiritual force'. He went on to comment in 1916 'I spoke to [Gwynne] regarding the importance of sending a message to all clergy to preach of the great object of the war viz. the freedom of mankind from German tyranny.'<sup>203</sup> His own unofficial chaplain, Rev. G.S. Duncan, was Haig's idea of the perfect chaplain- 'somebody who could make anyone fight'.<sup>204</sup> Snape also gives an example of a corps commander addressing his chaplains. He told them to 'preach constantly on Honour, Duty and Discipline... Honour, Duty and Discipline are the life of an army and you are the best people to inculcate them'.<sup>205</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Beddington, who was appointed senior staff officer, even ordered the dismissal of its Anglican senior chaplain because he tended to preach that 'unless you were really good, your chances of getting to Heaven were poor, whilst the doctrine needed for the men of an infantry division, whose expectation of life was bound to be short, should... approximate to that of the Mohammedan religion, i.e., he that dies in battle goes to Heaven'.<sup>206</sup>

Some officers certainly felt that Catholic chaplains were necessary for discipline. Fr. Bernard Page noted that when his orders came for his move to France, the commanding officer of the ninth battalion the East Lancashires was less than pleased. The East Lancs. generally had large numbers of Catholics both in the ranks and as officers. Page went on to point out that, in the ninth battalion, there were thirty one officers of

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<sup>203</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.96.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p106



which six were Catholic and he cites two examples of officers being very conscientious Catholics, 'Major Pearce (second in command) who attends Mass and communion every morning and Captain Power a most enthusiastic Beaumont boy'.<sup>207</sup> The Commanding Officer, who was not a Catholic, told Page; 'There is work for you to do here. I must have someone who my young fellows trust. They are good lads but only half disciplined. I want a padre to keep the Catholics in order and to be a good example to the rest. It is not everyone who can get hold of men'.<sup>208</sup> Irish Catholic chaplains did not necessarily see themselves in that light, however: 'Catholic chaplains saw themselves as savers of men's souls in whatever physical extremity or danger the men might be. For only in the front line could the Catholic chaplain administer the sacraments, hear confessions and grant absolution to the dying'.<sup>209</sup> Ultimately, or so it has been argued, 'Most Catholic chaplains enlisted in order to give spiritual assistance to persons in danger of death.'<sup>210</sup>

#### The motivation of some Irish priests to enlist as chaplains

It is difficult to ascertain exactly why Irish Catholic priests became chaplains. Those who were Maynooth educated hardly went to France in support of the Empire. Indeed, there is almost no reflection of Haig's aims in the comments of Irish chaplains. In contrast, those who expressed any political opinions seem to highlight a sense of Irishness rather than Britishness. Nonetheless, chaplains like Fr. Doyle could and did preach the righteousness of the wider cause to motivate their men. However, some motivations were clearly more

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<sup>207</sup> Page papers, file 25 JAD, Fr Page to Nolan, 27 December 1916.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>209</sup> Denman. *Catholic soldiers in WW 1* p.363.

<sup>210</sup> P. Bradley's papers, Franciscan archives, Killiney, Co. Dublin, P Bradley to B. Jackman, May 1915

personal. Fr. Henry Gill said in his diary that 'the immediate occasion of my departure was the growing belief that the war was going to be a long one and the fact that the large number of Catholic soldiers were not sufficiently provided with chaplains'.<sup>211</sup> Gill, however, seems to have been very unhappy prior to joining up. He had been a student at Louvain, then attended Cambridge where he studied under J.J. Thompson, the British physicist and Nobel laureate credited with the discovery of electrons. Back in Ireland, he was a teacher at Belvedere and was a spiritual director at Rathfarnham. He applied unsuccessfully for a research post at U.C.D. and later there was a possibility of his being posted to Australia. He was less than keen to go and, in his diary, he commented 'I have had a great deal of suffering from various causes, and suffer at times from depression and discouragement. Even the last three years have been very difficult and ones of continued disappointment'.<sup>212</sup> In August 1914, he promptly enlisted. Was this simply a diversion for Gill, an attempt to get over his disappointment and depression? The circumstantial evidence would seem to indicate this was the case.

Nevertheless, there were political reasons why some religious orders supported the war effort. The Jesuits had very strong links to the Irish Party and to John Redmond. As we have already mentioned, Henry Gill was the son of a Parnellite MP. John Redmond, his brother William, and his son William Archer were educated at Clongowes and many of the Catholic MPs were educated in Jesuit schools, including Tom Kettle and Hubert Michael O'Connor who was also educated at Clongowes. Both were killed in France. One of the sons of John Fitzgibbon MP was a Jesuit chaplain killed in France and Stephen

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<sup>211</sup> H Gill papers, JAD, Diary Vol.1 p7.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p.7

Gwynn's son was also a Jesuit (although Gwynn himself was a Protestant, his wife was a Catholic and his children were brought up as Catholics). The Irish province provided thirty-one Jesuit chaplains in the Great War, the majority for the British army in France, but about four went to the Australians, two to Egypt and one to Mesopotamia. Four were killed in the war and two died while on active service.<sup>213</sup> Seventy Jesuits from the English province also became chaplains. The contingent of secular clergy from Ireland totalled seventy-three priests, of whom twenty-two came from the urban centres of Dublin and Cork, the traditional recruiting grounds of the Dublin and Munster Fusiliers.

#### The nature of chaplain's work

The chaplains saw their work at the front as mainly sacramental in nature. Local churches were used, when possible, by arrangement with the local curé. Fr. Browne heard confession and celebrated benediction every evening between 5.30 and 7.00 pm. There was mass every morning and battalion Masses twice a week. Sunday Mass was attended by Browne's Irish Guards and also by other troops. Browne was almost contemptuous of non-Catholic work in canteens which, as we have seen, he regarded as 'not strictly ministerial work'.<sup>214</sup> Even in the front line, Browne felt his duties were sacramental and, in a letter to Nolan in April 1916, he described his efforts to get a 'make-shift' church for Mass in what appears to be Ypres ('a well-known town not somewhere in France').<sup>215</sup> Browne believed that it was important to accompany his men to the front line, getting wounded in the process. By January 1917 he was with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and

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<sup>213</sup> Information provided by the archivist at JAD. Nov. 2007.

<sup>214</sup> Browne Papers file 8 JAD F Browne to Rev. Nolan 21 Aug. 1916 .

<sup>215</sup> Browne Papers file 8 JAD F Browne to Rev. Nolan 15 April 1916.

described the death of a man he had just anointed, from a direct hit. 'The only trace we could find of him was a shinbone and foot (separated). He was one of the holiest men in the battalion-a daily communicant so he was well prepared.'<sup>216</sup> Catholic chaplains saw it as part of their duty to uphold the Catholic nature of an Irish battalion and Browne always stressed the presence of senior officers at Mass and communion; for example, he noted the attendance at Mass and communion of Brigadier-General Pereira in March 1916. Feilding also highlighted the attendance of senior officers at Mass and noted that a brigadier and the divisional commander of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division joined him at Mass in April 1917.<sup>217</sup> Browne was concerned that the Irish Guards retained its Catholic nature but, in June 1918, he 'greatly feared it would not.'<sup>218</sup> The reality was that throughout 1916 and 1917 recruitment in Ireland had declined and conscription was not enacted for Ireland until April 1918. It was not enforced even then. Irish regiments were being reinforced by English conscripts, hence Fr. Browne's fear that the Irish Guards would lose its religious character.

Both Frs. Browne and Gleeson held 'missions' during their time at the front. Browne's mission was a nightly affair. The 'mission', also referred to as a 'retreat', aimed at strengthening and refreshing the faith of the men. During the mission, Browne dealt with such issues as confession, sin, death and judgement, Hell, the Passion and, on Friday night, the Irish Guards' motto 'quis separabit nos'. The nightly instruction lasted from 5pm

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<sup>216</sup> Browne Papers file 8 JAD F Browne to Rev. Nolan 26 January 1917.

<sup>217</sup> Feilding, *War Letters to a Wife*, p106.

<sup>218</sup> Browne Papers file 8 JAD F Browne to Rev. Nolan 7 June 1918.

to 6.15pm followed by benediction and the rosary.<sup>219</sup> In early November 1918, Browne even had the 'wonderful experience of taking my men to Lourdes'. He had been organising trips to Lourdes and he noted that, by the end of the war, several groups of his men had gone there.<sup>220</sup>

In contrast to Doyle, McRory and to an extent, to Browne, Henry Gill believed that the 'great work done by the chaplain is out of the trenches'. However, he did admit that it was vital for the chaplain to be brave enough to go to the trenches so he would 'have some credibility when he spoke of bravery and patience and confidence in God'.<sup>221</sup> He believed it more important that the chaplain ensure that the men received absolution and communion *before* going into the trenches as he believed there was little opportunity to give these while they were actually in 'the line'. He also 'collected the wounded from the regimental aid post in a horse-drawn ambulance, heard confessions, visited the sick, buried the dead and one fellow had to be helped before being shot for desertion'.<sup>222</sup> In a letter to Nolan he mentioned the difficulties of the work: 'I hear confessions in fields, by the roadside, generally in several inches of mud. I am here about ten days and have heard three hundred confessions.'<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Browne Papers, file 8 JAD F Browne to Rev. Nolan . 9 Nov. 1917.

<sup>220</sup> Browne Papers, file 8 JAD F Browne to Rev. Nolan, 13 Nov.1918.

<sup>221</sup> H. Gill Papers, box 25 ,Diary ch. 1 p10.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., Diary, p.19.

<sup>223</sup> H. Gill papers, box 25 JAD, from H.Gill to Rev. Nolan 14 Dec.1914.

For the Catholic chaplain, the local Catholic church was usually available for use. Fr. Gill mentioned an affable *curé* in Bailleul in October 1915 who allowed him to use the church for rosary and benediction. He pointed out that the local population also attended the rosary which they answered in French, while Benediction was sung by all in Latin. There was a shortage of French clergy, mainly because many were away in the army. On one occasion it was Gill who gave the 'first communions' in French. In another parish (this time Nieppe) in December 1916, Gill was particularly grateful for the co-operation of the local *curé* who made the chaplains welcome 'and put his house at their disposal and allowed them to use his replacement wooden chapel'.<sup>224</sup> In return, Gill helped out with the confessions. Gleeson also mentioned the Catholicism of the French countryside. In his diary he said: 'Every little village had its *missacanta* at 10 AM every Sunday and the cure usually sings it. We had AUB at 9 o'clock Mass and CHD at 11 o'clock mass.'<sup>225</sup> Browne mentioned using the local churches in his diary of 11 November 1918 for a High Mass of thanksgiving and, on another occasion, Gill complained about the lack of churches in an area near the Belgian border: 'few opportunities for prayer, not a church within miles'.<sup>226</sup>

While Irish political leaders were keen to stress the similarities between Ireland and Flanders and the chaplains almost constantly referred to the Catholic nature of the French peasants, it is important to point out that relations between state and church in France were very poor in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both Gleeson and Gill referred to the problems facing Catholicism in France in the post-1904 period. Gleeson was for a time in

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<sup>224</sup> H, Gill papers, box 25, JAD, Diary p.111.

<sup>225</sup> F.Gleeson papers Archdiocese of Dublin Archives, [hereinafter cited as ADA], diary 7 Feb.1915.

<sup>226</sup> H. Gill papers, box 25, JAD p.42.

Bethune, which was an industrial area particularly famous for its coalmines. The area was politically socialist and had an anti-catholic atmosphere. Gill, working in the same area, complained of a lack of religion 'in this part of France.'<sup>227</sup> A *curé* told him it was a result of the influence of state schools, but Gill believed it was the result of apathy because he argued that every little village had its own church and it was the priest who had to travel from village to village- the people had to make no effort.<sup>228</sup> He went on to say that, generally, the *curés* were 'old men who couldn't instruct young children', the younger ones he supposed were away in the army.<sup>229</sup> On the other hand, Gill also said that some people were sympathetic; he called them 'the better class of French people' who were glad to meet Catholic chaplains. Many had sons who were Jesuits.<sup>230</sup> Fr. McRory, usually very critical of the different nationalities he encountered in Flanders (and in particular the English, the Germans and the Indians) commented very favourably on the French and Belgians: 'the French and Belgians are most hospitable'.<sup>231</sup>

One of the duties of the chaplain at the front was to write home to the relatives of the soldiers killed, missing or wounded. On occasion, the parents of missing men would write to the chaplain asking him to find the whereabouts of their son or the circumstances of his death. Fr. Gleeson kept the letters he received from parents and they reveal the importance of the chaplain as a link between home and the young soldier and, in many

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<sup>227</sup> H, Gill papers, box 25, JAD Diary p.84

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p.84.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p.118.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p.103.

<sup>231</sup> J McRory papers , PRONI, diary bk. 1, p.35.

ways, between parents and the war itself. They also reveal the very high regard in which the chaplain was held and serve as a reminder of the very religious nature of many in Irish society, particularly of the poorer classes. The letters to Gleeson tend to be from parents in the Cork and Kerry areas which were the traditional recruiting areas of the Royal Munster Fusiliers. The addresses suggest areas of poverty. In Cork City, Shandon Street and Harpur's Lane; in Dublin, Eccles Street. Margaret Manghan wrote to Gleeson of 'the glorious consolation it is to me to know that he received the rights of the church ere his death. May God with the intercession of his blessed Mother, guard you from all harm and grant you life to follow your precious duties'.<sup>232</sup> Similarly, Margaret Burke of Listowel wrote to Gleeson regarding her husband, Pte. W. Burke, who was missing in action:

My heart is broken but I will unite my troubles with the Mother of Jesus. My one consolation is that I have the pleasure of knowing that he received Holy communion on that morning, twas my one prayer every night and morning. I would offer the most precious body and blood of Jesus Christ through the hands of his Immaculate Mother to plead for the preservation of my husband or if twas his holy will that he should die, that he would get every grace for a happy and Holy death. So if the worst have come, I will be comforted by knowing he was well prepared to meet his Master.<sup>233</sup>

Elizabeth Meany of Eccles Street, Dublin, wrote to Gleeson regarding her son who was captured after Passchendaele and was a prisoner of war: 'I had previously put in a petition to the Sacred Heart in "The Messenger" under whose protection he was placed

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<sup>232</sup> Gleeson papers ADA, M. Mangan to F. Gleeson, 7 June 1915.

<sup>233</sup> Gleeson papers ADA, M. Burke to F. Gleeson, 24 May 1915.



when going out again, so I had every confidence that his adorable Sacred Heart would bring him safely back to me'. She went on to say that he had been in the 'first landings at [the] Dardanelles being in the 1st battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers and escaped with four flesh wounds.'<sup>234</sup> Other letters from Ireland requested information on the exact whereabouts of graves of loved ones and, on 19 April 1917, Mrs. Keating of Listowel, Co. Kerry, wrote to Gleeson requesting a sketch of her son's grave. If Gleeson is typical, a great deal of time seems to have been spent by the chaplain responding to letters from home and also in writing to tell parents and family of the situation regarding their loved ones whether they were wounded, prisoner or killed in action.

The Irish Catholic chaplain enjoyed a very good reputation which was generally well-deserved in terms of looking after the spiritual needs of his men. Other chaplains of different denominations were often overlooked and the criticism of them was often unfair. Furthermore, not all Catholic chaplains were brave in the same way as Fr. Doyle was and, of course, many chaplains of other denominations were at least as brave- as instanced by several VCs awarded to them. It is not always clear as to why Irish priests volunteered for chaplaincy work in the forces. Fr. Browne led an adventurous life before being a chaplain and had travelled on the *Titanic* as far as Queenstown, where his provincial ordered him to leave the ship. He was to become a famous photographer and has left a huge archive of pictures including the last photographs of *Titanic* as it left Queenstown for New York. Fr. Gill seemed unhappy with the work he was doing and was worried about being sent to Australia. He had also been disappointed in his career previously. Fr. Doyle had a history of extreme mortification of the flesh and an ambition to

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<sup>234</sup> Gleeson papers, ADA, E. Meany to F. Gleeson 23 December 1917.

die a martyr's death. Many of the chaplains examined, perhaps the majority, had been educated at Maynooth and came from reasonably well-off farming backgrounds where there was no tradition of support for involvement in 'England's Wars'. There was little or no stress on the 'righteousness of our cause,' with the exception of the very real anger at the destruction of Louvain- and that was because of its Irish connections. What does come across is a concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of the Irish soldiers and a genuine sympathy for their families at home in Ireland.

## Chapter Three

### The Men

In his letters to his wife, Rowland Feilding commented favourably on the character and religiosity of the men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers, a battalion which he had just taken command of; he noted that they were very different in character and in particular that 'they are intensely religious'....<sup>235</sup> Feilding had previously been with the Coldstream Guards. This characteristic of Irish soldiers in the First World War is mentioned by numerous observers and by the vast majority of their chaplains. MacDonagh, writing at the time, described them as 'Saint-like' and as 'The most religious soldiers in the British Army'.<sup>236</sup> Non-Irish Catholics at the time were also impressed. One British chaplain noted 'the astounding faith of the Irish',<sup>237</sup> while another marvelled that '99 out of 100 Irish would explain correctly Immaculate Conception.'<sup>238</sup> Non-Catholics too were impressed. Colonel J. E Nelson admitted that 'I used to envy my Catholic comrades their great faith.'<sup>239</sup> A more recent commentator concluded that 'Certainly, the religiousness [sic] of the Catholic Irish... contrasts starkly with the mass of English soldiers, in whom religious

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<sup>235</sup> Feilding. *War letters*, p.75.

<sup>236</sup> M. MacDonagh, *Irish at the Front*, ( London, 1916), p.11.

<sup>237</sup> C. Plater SJ (ed.) *Catholic Soldiers by sixty chaplains*. (London 1919) p.110.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>239</sup> Nelson, *The pre -1914 Army*.p.170.

feeling does not appear to be strong.’<sup>240</sup> In this section, I will examine the factors on which these claims of religiosity are based and also whether there was any difference between the volunteer soldiers of the ‘new armies’ and the ‘old soldiers’ of the pre-war army. Furthermore, did the devotion of the Irish troops manifest itself in any other ways? What, if anything, set them apart from other soldiers?

### The devotion of Irish Soldiers

The devotion of Irish soldiers was measured by observers in a variety of ways. For Feilding, it was the willingness of the sixth battalion, the Connaught Rangers, to attend Mass, which he mentioned on several occasions. At Christmas 1916, he commented on the desire of his men to attend mass; ‘The chaplain came up and said Mass this morning... The men manning the fire-trench of course could not attend but it was not a case of driving the rest; rather indeed of keeping them away. The intensity of their religion is something quite remarkable, and I had under-estimated it’.<sup>241</sup> This devotion to the Mass could also be found in the Irish Guards. The chaplain to 2<sup>nd</sup> Irish Guards was Fr. F. Browne who wrote to his provincial in Dublin on 15 March 1916: ‘We have battalion Masses twice in the week. At Mass on Sunday I have about 1050 men present – 835 of them Irish Guards.’ In the same letter, he told the provincial ‘Nearly every morning there are a few soldiers to be seen at early Mass’.<sup>242</sup> In a later letter he told of a battalion move at night

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<sup>240</sup> T Denman ‘The Irish Catholic Soldier in the First World War, The Racial Environment’ *Irish Historical Studies* XXVII Nov. 1991, p.363.

<sup>241</sup> Feilding, War Letters p.85

<sup>242</sup> F. Browne papers, JAD file 8.F. Browne to Rev. Nolan, 15 March 1916.

to a front line position and his search for a place to say Mass in the morning. He found it impossible to get anywhere and discussed it with some NCOs. Within an hour, the men had found a large, half-ruined house with a room that was almost shellproof. The men said they would clean it. They organised 'a carpet of sandbags and found a mahogany table as an altar. Congratulations to the NCO's and men'.<sup>243</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Feilding continued to be impressed by the devotion of his men to the Mass. As a Catholic, Feilding himself attended Mass and described a famous High Mass in Locre on 22 April 1917 which seems to have been very similar to a French *Messe Militaire*. The Mass involved the divisional band, the divisional commander and a brigadier. The band played at various times during the Mass and crucifixes, which had been blessed by the Pope and brought from Rome by Cardinal Bourne, were distributed to the men. These had been sent out by Feilding's wife.<sup>244</sup> On another occasion in Locre, 'High Mass was sung, three priests officiated. Soldiers accompanied by a soldier organist, composed the choir; and the battalion bugles sounded the "General Salute" during the "Elevation"... the smart and soldierly appearance of the men was very remarkable. But there is never any difficulty in getting a good Irish battalion to turn out well to go to Mass.'<sup>245</sup> Later in the year, at Christmas, Feilding was concerned for the safety of his soldiers attending a Christmas Mass in the front line trenches, 'not more than 500 yards from the German line... though the place is concealed from the enemy by an intervening ridge, promiscuous bits do come over, and I debated for some time whether to allow it. In the end, expecting perhaps a hundred men, I consented. But though, like most soldiers

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<sup>243</sup> F. Browne papers, JAD file 8, F. Browne to Rev. Nolan, 15 April 1916.

<sup>244</sup> Feilding, *War Letters*, p106.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.

they will shirk their fatigues, if they get the chance, these men will not shirk what they consider to be their religious duties, and about 300 turned up.<sup>246</sup>

Fr. Willie Doyle SJ went to great lengths to ensure Mass was said for his men at Loos: 'He discovered a tiny wayside chapel of Our Lady of Consolation with the altar still standing; and here amid the inferno of shot and shell he celebrated Mass.'<sup>247</sup> Doyle clearly understood the importance of the Mass to his men. 'Our poor lads are just grand, they curse like troopers all the day, they give the Germans hell, purgatory and heaven all combined at night and in the morning come kneeling in the mud for Mass and communion when they get a chance'.<sup>248</sup> On Easter Sunday he said Mass in the front line trenches. On Christmas Eve 1916 he said Midnight Mass at the convent in Locre: 'An hour before Mass every inch of space was filled, even inside the altar rails and in the corridor while numbers had to remain in the open.'<sup>249</sup> Mass was an important sacrament to all Catholics, not just to Irish ones, but it appears that Irish soldiers were more inclined to attend than other Catholics. Feilding was surprised at the devotion of the men of the Connaught Rangers but he had not been involved with an Irish regiment before, although he was a Catholic. This suggests that Catholics he had encountered before were not as devout. In *Catholic Soldiers*<sup>250</sup> one chaplain complained that '60% are careless about

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid.,p.86

<sup>247</sup> A O' Rahilly. *Martyr Priest, The Life and Death of Fr. William Doyle* ( Limerick, 1929) p27.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>250</sup> This contains the evidence of sixty Chaplains and many other officers and men. They answered a variety of questions relating to the religiosity of the Catholic soldiers in the war.

Sunday Mass when it involves an effort'; that particular chaplain was with English front line troops.<sup>251</sup> Another chaplain agreed that 'The English out of the line I have found a slack and disappointing lot. The better part of them, have been those of Irish extraction.'<sup>252</sup> This view is largely supported by the observations of a major in an Irish battalion which was 60% Catholic: 'Nearly all the Catholic men of the battalion went to the short voluntary afternoon service held by the padre... one or two officers nearly always served Mass on Sundays'.<sup>253</sup> A captain in the Tyneside Irish agreed with him and pointed out that the men attended Mass in the French village churches and also 'attended Mass in the field in large numbers although the parades were voluntary'.<sup>254</sup>

The sacrament of penance (or confession) was one that set Catholics apart from other denominations. For devout soldiers, confession and absolution were very important, especially before a battle. If the confession was perfect, the absolved soul could look forward to going straight to Heaven and a good confession before death was seen by the Catholic clergy as a vital tool in the saving of a soul, which was their primary aim. Indeed, 'Priests would go to great lengths to save the souls of one or two who had "fallen". Fr. Doyle's biographer goes on to describe an almost a physical battle between Priest and Satan for the soul of a lapsed Catholic.'<sup>255</sup> In Ireland, confession was usually on a monthly basis and was followed on the proceeding Sunday by Holy Communion. It was

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<sup>251</sup> Plater (ed), *Catholic Soldiers*, p.44.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>255</sup> O'Rahilly, *Martyr Priest*, pp.54-56

rarely received more than monthly for reasons I will examine later. During the war, however, there was a much greater demand for confession due to the closeness of death in the trenches. This closeness of death may well have encouraged those who were referred to as 'negligent Catholics' to have 'returned to their duties and kept it up fairly well during the war'.<sup>256</sup>

Fr. Browne of the Irish Guards described hearing confessions every evening between 5.30 pm and 7.30pm, pointing out that he was unable to leave the confessional before 7.30pm and 'on Saturday I was there from 5.15pm until 8pm without a break.'<sup>257</sup> He went on to point out in the same letter that 'the Curé and the various people in the town are quite surprised at the fervour of the men, especially in the matter of confession'.

<sup>258</sup> The importance of confession was pointed out to the Irish Guards by Fr. Browne in a 'Mission' he held before Christmas 1917. The instructions to the soldiers were detailed, including 'self-accusation, preparation and general confession'. The Mission included an evening devoted to 'Sin' on Tuesday and one on 'Hell' on Wednesday. The Mission lasted for a week and took place between 5.00 p.m. and 6.30 p.m. daily. It included rosary and benediction and 'more than five hundred attended each evening.'<sup>259</sup> Fr. Henry Gill of the second battalion, the Royal Irish Rifles, also noted the importance of confession and felt that, from a practical point of view, the sacramental work done behind the front line was more important than work in the front line trenches and that included confession.<sup>260</sup> In a

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<sup>256</sup> Plater (ed). *Catholic Soldiers*, p.47

<sup>257</sup> F.Browne papers JAD, file 8, F Browne to Rev. Nolan, 15 March 16

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 9 Nov.1917.

<sup>260</sup> H.Gill papers, JAD box 25 unpublished memoirs, p.5.



letter to his provincial, he wrote about 'hearing confessions in fields, by the roadside and generally in several inches of mud. I have been here about ten days and I have heard about three hundred confessions'.<sup>261</sup> He believed that regular confession encouraged the men, whom he felt 'Remained wonderfully good despite the temptations of the French towns' although there were fewer 'dangers' at the front apart from 'drink'.<sup>262</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, receiving Holy Communion was generally a monthly occasion in Ireland and this habit was something that had to be overcome if soldiers were to receive frequently. The main reason why Communion was taken so rarely may well have more to do with practicalities than anything else. At the time, Communion was taken after a fast since midnight. Masses for the more respectable were generally held around 11.00 a.m. and, especially in rural Ireland, a great deal of work would have to be done on farms before Mass. Added to this was the possibility of long distances to be travelled from outlying areas and, despite their devotion, many people felt that once per month was sufficient. Indeed, prior to the Catholic reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Communion was received less frequently. Another factor which discouraged the frequent reception of Communion may have been the respect with which the host was regarded. The host was taken in the mouth only and the priest was followed by an acolyte bearing a platter to catch it should it drop. As the host was accepted as the Body of Christ, any disrespect was viewed as a major 'sin' and in Ireland a huge body of myths existed relating to the awful consequences of showing disrespect to the host. On the Western Front, regulations were relaxed regarding Communion in an attempt to encourage many more to receive. Non-

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<sup>261</sup> H.Gill papers, JAD box 25, H Gill to Rev. Nolan, 14 Dec.1914.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 18 Feb.1915.

fasting Communion was introduced and, while not all soldiers were happy with it in the beginning, it became the norm.

Soldiers also appreciated the 'general absolution' which often replaced individual confession before a battle, the most famous case being that of the 'Last Absolution of the Munsters at the Rue du Bois', a scene that was immortalised by Fortunino Matania. Here, Fr. Gleeson gave general absolution on the evening before an attack on 9 May 1915, later having to take time off from the front as a consequence of the high losses sustained by the Munsters that day. Fr. Henry Gill was also very keen that that his men received absolution before going to the trenches as he pointed out that there was 'no opportunity to give either extreme unction or absolution there'.<sup>263</sup> He even extended general absolution to German prisoners of war on Christmas Day 1916 so that they could receive Communion at Christmas Mass. Feilding also mentioned general absolution being given to all ranks in the trenches facing Ginchy on 8 September 1916 on the eve of an attack.<sup>264</sup> General absolution does appear to have encouraged soldiers to attend Communion more often. Fr. Browne, in a letter to his provincial in Dublin, told him that he had about 1050 men under his charge, of whom 835 were Irish Guards. Of these, '400 went to communion [on Sunday] and all the officers including Brig. General Pereira went to communion'. Browne also mentioned that every day he had a few soldiers 'at early Mass for communion'.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> H.Gill papers, JAD box 25, unpublished memoirs .p14.

<sup>264</sup> Feilding *War Letters*. p.70.

<sup>265</sup> F.Browne papers JAD, file 8, F Browne to Rev. Nolan. 15 March 1916.

An outward sign of a soldier's Catholic faith was the possession of rosary beads, and other religious items such as miraculous medals, scapulars, and relics. These religious items were often kept by non-Catholics and it was suggested that they were simply being used as a good luck charm. All the chaplains questioned in *Catholic Soldiers* were keen to refute this suggestion. They pointed out that rosary beads were seen as protection in the religious sense as an intercession with the Virgin or as an aid to devotion.<sup>266</sup> Other chaplains suggested that the beads were a badge of religion: 'some like to wear them as a means of showing their religion, in case they got wounded or killed'.<sup>267</sup> There is a good example of the importance attached to religious objects in Feilding's description of the handing out of crosses at Loche. Feilding, who was surprised and very impressed by the devotion of his 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers, had his wife get miniature crucifixes for his men. These were taken by Cardinal Bourne to Rome to be blessed by the Pope. These were distributed with great ceremony at High Mass, to the Connaught Rangers. There were also many requests by other Catholic soldiers for the crucifixes.<sup>268</sup> Fr. Bradley also mentioned giving scapulars, medals and badges to Catholic prisoners of war.<sup>269</sup>

Rosary beads were not just used as a badge of religion. There are several accounts of rosaries been said by men in the front line and also by men awaiting execution.<sup>270</sup> Lieutenant Stirling of the 2nd Leinsters invited his men to say the rosary while in the front line at Guillemont: 'The Germans were shelling us heavily... the shells were bursting on

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<sup>266</sup> Plater (ed), *Catholic Soldiers*, pp.27-28.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>268</sup> Feilding, *War Letters*, p.106.

<sup>269</sup> Johnstone and Hagerty, *Cross on the Sword*. (London, 1996) p.137.

<sup>270</sup> Plater (ed), *Catholic Soldiers*, p.128.

the parapet when I asked my men if any of them would care to say the rosary. They were simply delighted, so the Captain gave it out . By the time we had finished, the shelling had finished completely, so we have the rosary every evening now in or out of the trenches'.<sup>271</sup> John Lucy made reference to the rosary being said during the retreat from Mons in 1914 by Sergeant Kelly who was mortally wounded. He took 'out his rosary beads and began to tell them'.<sup>272</sup> Even non-Catholics were often keen to have religious items such as beads and crucifixes. Feilding had written to his wife that everyone wanted her crucifixes, including non- Catholics. A priest who had served as a chaplain in the Eastern Mediterranean in 1915 agreed that non-Catholics carried rosary beads: 'I remember once coming across two wounded men lying in adjoining cots, both wearing rosary beads around their necks yet neither was a Catholic.'<sup>273</sup>

Michael MacDonagh wrote at length in November 1916 about the wearing of religious emblems by men at the front. He, too, noted that this was not simply confined to Catholics. His article, published in *The Occult Review* in November 1916, drew the distinction between non-Christian charms and religious objects. The charms were typified by 'Touchwood' a tiny imp-like figure, nearly all head , made of oak with legs of silver and gold and wearing a soldier's cap which was common during the war. MacDonagh was told by the designer, H. Brandon, that he had sold over one and a half million of them since the war began.<sup>274</sup> Catholic emblems were different, however. Scapulars, miraculous medals and rosary beads were common, as was the sewing on of the badge of the Sacred Heart to

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<sup>271</sup> Johnstone and Hagerty, *Cross on the Sword*. (London, 1996) p 135.

<sup>272</sup> Lucy, J. F., *There's a Devil in the Drum* (London, 1993 )p.250.

<sup>273</sup> Ignotius, ' Pastoral Work in Wartime', *Irish Ecclesiastical Review*, 1916 vol. 8. 352-357 at p.355.

<sup>274</sup> M. Mac Donagh, 'Wearing of Religious Emblems', *The Occult Review*. Nov. 1916. 266-274, at p.269.

the inside of uniforms. In the opinion of the soldiers, these badges acted as protection from enemy bullets and shells. Lance Corporal Cuddy of the Liverpool Irish, who was awarded the DCM at Festubert in 1915 for crawling into no-man's-land several times to rescue wounded comrades, claimed that the German snipers 'are powerless to hit me. I carry the Pope's prayer about me and I put my faith in that'.<sup>275</sup> In another article in the same magazine, an anonymous contributor claimed that he pinned a Sacred Heart badge inside a soldier's cap and gave him a cardboard crucifix shield. 'He first got a bullet straight through his cap. The least bit lower and he would have been killed. Then he got a heavy blow... and on examination his tunic was burnt inside and a bullet was lodged in the crucifix'.<sup>276</sup> The writer also believed that St. Michael the 'Angel of War' had important spiritual powers. He finished his letter with a discussion of the Angels of Mons saying that an officer told him that his servant had actually seen them!

### Were Irish Soldiers really more religious than others?

Irish soldiers have been singled out for their religion and devotion during the war and, undoubtedly, the amount of evidence suggests that this was generally the case. Michael Snape has suggested that they were not unique in this respect and that, in general, there was a strong religious background in the 'old army', pointing out that virtually all soldiers attended church parades, albeit often resentfully. He further cites examples given by chaplains of increased interest in religion of men about to go into battle.<sup>277</sup> Bickersteth's

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p.267

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., Jan. 1917, p.50.

<sup>277</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.45.

comment on there being 'no atheists in the trenches' is largely supported by a quote from *Catholic Soldiers*: 'Speaking roughly, the fervour of the men's Catholicity was at any moment proportional to the amount of danger that was to be faced'.<sup>278</sup> Michael MacDonagh also pointed out that non-Catholic soldiers 'crave for spiritual help and companionship and that if there was scoffing at a praying soldier in barracks, there was respect for him in the trenches'.<sup>279</sup> Overall, Snape believes that the volunteer army of 1914-1916 was in fact more religious than the conscript army of 1917-18.

#### A different impression of Irish soldiers

When looking at Irish soldiers, this does not appear to be the pattern. The impression of the pre-war professional Irish soldier is not really one of a devoutly religious individual. In his book, *Devil in the Drum*, John Lucy makes little mention of religion in the pre-war army. Lucy's regiment, the Royal Irish Rifles, based in Belfast, was an unusual choice for Lucy as he was a Corkman. Furthermore, in terms of religious composition, it appears to have been largely Catholic and Lucy himself refers to men from many different parts of Ireland in the regiment. On his first night in barracks, he told of how himself and his brother knelt by their beds to say their prayers: 'After that night we resolved to say them in bed'.<sup>280</sup> He doesn't explain why this should be the case but possibly it was due to reactions from his fellow soldiers either because of the outward display of devotion or because of sectarian differences. Lucy and his brother were unlikely to be typical of the

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<sup>278</sup> Plater (ed), *Catholic Soldiers*, p.50

<sup>279</sup> MacDonagh, 'Wearing of Religious Emblems', p.273.

<sup>280</sup> Lucy, *Devil in the Drum*, p.20.

usual recruit as he came from a reasonably well-to-do family, his father being a cattle dealer. Most of Lucy's further comments on religion are more to do with sectarianism than with devotion. He found the garrison town to be bigoted and constantly complained about attempts to evangelise the soldiers- 'Tracts were everywhere, the products of a dozen queer sects.'<sup>281</sup> He complained that soldiers were bribed with tea and buns in the Soldiers' Home on condition they went upstairs to sing hymns. Later on, he told of an incident in England where a Munster Fusilier in a drunken state came looking for an Orangeman to fight, making the assumption that Northern regiments were Protestant. There are a few references to religion during the retreat from Mons. He himself prayed nightly and he comments on the devotion of a sergeant who treated the wounded and buried the dead. While Lucy does not mention the lack of chaplains, the fact that the dead were being buried by a devout sergeant suggests that there were very few on the retreat from Mons.

Michael McConville joined the army in 1899 and, like Lucy, he too joined the Royal Irish Rifles. There are very few comments on religion in his account of soldiering in the years leading up to the Great War. Any comments on religion tend to be related to sectarianism rather than devotion. Unlike Lucy, McConville came from a long line of soldiers. His ancestors had been in the Crimean War, Indian Mutiny and the Zulu War. He was from the Falls Road in Belfast and clearly understood sectarianism better than Lucy. He was religious to the point of attending Mass regularly, a fact he points out while relating the story of a wedding in which he, as best man, almost ended up as groom.<sup>282</sup> He

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>282</sup> Michael McConville, 'Young Soldier Vintage 1899', *Mighty Organ*, 2006, pp.1-14.

commented on the divisions within the regiment, in particular he wrote that the 'Orangemen of his regiment were put out when they listened to the band of the Wexford Militia playing 'The Boys of Wexford', their regimental march. Later on, in Calcutta on St. Patrick's Day, he noted that when the regimental band played the Catholic hymn called 'St. Patrick's Day' the Protestants looked on disapprovingly and were totally disgusted later when the parade commander played the same march for the Protestant church parade.<sup>283</sup>

McConville makes no mention of devotional religion or chaplains, but his account is littered with comments relating to heavy drinking, stealing and the ill-treatment of recruits by other soldiers. The impression of the pre-war Irish soldier is not the one given by wartime chaplains and writers like MacDonagh. The army in Ireland in the years leading up to 1914 was more likely to be associated with prostitution than with prayer. In *Catholic Soldiers*, a chaplain commented that the old serving soldiers were the ones most likely to have lost their faith: 'One receives the impression that the pre-war Army was not a good school for Catholics.'<sup>284</sup> Part of the reason may have been the lack of chaplains. In Ireland, Catholic soldiers were looked after spiritually by the local priests. There were few special arrangements whereby priests visited barracks. It was preferred by the army that Catholic soldiers march to Mass on Sunday to the local church. These priests had little or no experience of the pastoral care of soldiers and, as I noted in an earlier section, most of them would have been unsympathetic to them both from a class perspective and also from a political one.

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>284</sup> Plater (ed), *Catholic Soldiers*. p.93.



In August 1914 there were seventeen Catholic chaplains, of whom six were serving overseas. There were Catholic priests in India, many of them Irish, and Catholic soldiers had access to them but they were not army chaplains. McConville points out the existence of Catholic churches when he was in India but makes no other reference to them. Soldiers in Irish regiments were very likely to spend some time in India. In August 1914, the first battalions of the following regiments were abroad, most of them in India: Royal Irish Regiment, Leinster Regiment, Royal Munster Fusiliers, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Connaught Rangers. Life in India for a soldier does not appear to have been conducive to religious devotion. McConville described a soldier's day beginning around 8.00 a.m. with a pre-breakfast parade and effectively ending after breakfast with a barrack room inspection. Between noon and 1.00 p.m. the wet canteen was open. Up to six pints of beer could be consumed by bored soldiers. After a long sleep in the heat of the afternoon, another six to eight pints were often consumed in the evening. This view of life in India is corroborated by Herbert Compton who served there as a hussar in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He pointed out that there was little to do in India: 'There were native workers for everything, including getting horses ready in the morning- "Idleness is the root of all evil" and if this may be applied to the average British soldier in India, the long, long weary day from ten to five – seven mortal hours with nothing to do but to keep out of the sun – it is to blame for many a crime committed, many a constitution wrecked, many a man gone wrong.'<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> H. Compton, *Kings Hussar* (London 1893) , p.162.

Another diversion for soldiers in India was the prostitute. McConville doesn't mention sex or vice or venereal disease but his son, who edited the memoir, quoted some statistics from Younghusband. He argued that 'more than half the British troops then serving in India [i.e. in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century] had been treated for venereal disease'.<sup>286</sup> Holmes's figures for the years 1890-1893 are 438 per 1000.<sup>287</sup> As we have seen, most Irish regiments spent time in India so it is likely that many suffered from venereal disease. In Ireland, too, there was a strong connection between prostitution and the army. While it should be noted that not all soldiers stationed in Ireland were Irish or Catholic, many Irish regiments did tours of duty in Ireland. Frank O'Connor, whose father and uncles were Munster Fusiliers, described the situation in Cork in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: 'Barrack Street was rough like all places attached to military barracks. There were women who went with soldiers and girls who went with officers, and sinister houses where people drank after hours. The regiments at the barracks were always changing and while the fast girls compared lovers- English, Welsh or Scotch- Father compared the height and smartness of the men'.<sup>288</sup>

Probably the largest area of vice in Europe was officially tolerated in Dublin. The area of brothels and illegal shebeens known as the 'Monto', or 'the kips', was linked to the presence of the army. Gary Boyd called it 'a by-product of the military presence necessary

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<sup>286</sup> McConville, 'Young Soldier', p.23.

<sup>287</sup> R. Holmes, *Sahib* (London, 2006), p.483

<sup>288</sup> F O'Connor, *An Only Child* (London, 1970) p.18-19.

to keep Ireland loyal and in line'.<sup>289</sup> The Monto was said to be busiest after the Crimean and Boer wars. After Irish independence in 1922, Irish governments dealt with the problem of Monto by clearing it out. They also linked the enormous sexual health problem in the Free State to the British Army, although a report on sexual health published by the National Army in 1926 painted an alarming picture of widespread venereal disease in towns throughout Ireland associated with 'decent girls' rather than professionals.<sup>290</sup> Even so, the Free State authorities still insisted the British army was the main cause of the problem.

The linking of the British Army and vice is a long way removed from the religious devotion of Irish soldiers described during the war, yet the latter descriptions were in fact recent. As noted previously, the reputation of the soldier in Ireland was not high in the years before the war. The sort of people who became British soldiers were believed to be 'scapegoats, those in debt or in trouble over a girl.'<sup>291</sup> Staunton gives an example of an incident in Kilrush Co. Clare where a respectable farmer attacked a soldier saying 'it was all the scruff and corner boys that were in the army.'<sup>292</sup> Anti-army sentiments were rife throughout Irish society, and that included leaders of the Catholic Church, but by far the most vicious were held by Nationalists who were opposed to any Irishmen joining the

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<sup>289</sup> G Boyd, *Dublin 1745-1922* (Dublin 2006), p191.

<sup>290</sup> G Howell, 'Venereal Disease and Prostitution in the Irish Free State', *Irish Historical Studies*, May 2003. 320-341, at p. 324.

<sup>291</sup> P. Karlsten, 'Suborned or Subordinate', *Journal of the History Society*, vol. 17, 1983, 31-64 at p.37.

<sup>292</sup> M. Staunton. Kilrush, Co. Clare and the Royal Munster Fusiliers. *Irish Sword* vol. 16. 1986, 268-272 at p.270.

British army and who felt that the proper role for an Irish soldier was fighting against Britain. The attacks on the British army were common in the pages of the *United Irishman*, the voice of Sinn Fein. Here the army was portrayed as criminal and immoral. When a magistrate in Galway told a young thief to join the army, the *United Irishman* agreed. 'We are in complete agreement..... that the British Army is the proper place for the criminal classes.'<sup>293</sup> In 1905 the publication of venereal disease figures in the Army led the *United Irishman* to note: 'One out of every four men in the British Army is incapacitated by unmentionable diseases... there is almost as much immorality in the British Army as in all the armies of the great powers combined. The British Army was the most physically and morally degraded army in the world... a leprous army'.<sup>294</sup> Denman quotes several of these articles from all over Ireland. In 1906 anti-recruiting posters in Longford told their readers to 'make a vow that you will not recognise or mix with any man who dons the livery of an Irish slave... and keep your children from mixing with..... the slaughterers of innocent Boer women and children'.<sup>295</sup>

As early as 1901, Archbishop Walsh of Dublin had linked prostitution in the city to the presence of the British army and in this opinion he was supported by advanced Nationalists like Maud Gonne, who claimed that she received complaints from parents of young ladies who had difficulties in going to Irish language classes 'because of the condition of the streets through the disgraceful conduct of the British military'. She went

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<sup>293</sup> Denman, '*Red Livery of Shame*', p.217.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p218.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p.220.

on to complain that she had occasion to go to the Post Office at 10.00 p.m. and 'was intentionally jostled against by soldiers and screamed at by poor unfortunate girls, whom the soldiers seem to incite to insult any respectable woman who ventures on what they consider and what the police consider, their side of the street.'<sup>296</sup> In 1906, Stephen Gwynn, in a speech to members of the National League, claimed that 'the men who joined the army were not the pick of Ireland... they are loafers at the street corners... it was the thoughtless and vicious who joined it'.<sup>297</sup> Gwynn was, of course, very active in encouraging recruiting during the First World War as was Tom Kettle, who had tried to convince Redmond to make anti-recruitment part of IPP policy. In 1905, the GAA introduced a ban on British soldiers and policemen playing Gaelic games (a ban not lifted until recently). As late as 1913 there was an anti- recruiting campaign in Belfast. The campaign encouraged people to 'Boycott England's immoral army'.<sup>298</sup>

Despite the sudden change of attitude towards the Union in August 1914, and particularly towards enlistment in the army, advanced Nationalists continued to be hostile to the Irishman in British uniform and much of the criticism centred on the soldier's reputation for drunkenness and, particularly, for sexual immorality. As the war proceeded these criticisms were levelled at girls left behind by the departing soldiers. Wives, relatives and dependants of soldiers received an allowance directly, paid out to them at the Post Office. It was reported that there was a high incidence of drunkenness amongst these

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<sup>296</sup> M. Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society 1800-1940* (Cambridge, 2007), p.158

<sup>297</sup> Denman, '*Red Livery of Shame*', p.229.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p.230.

women and an inquiry was established in December 1914 which rejected the allegations. It suggested that: 'On the contrary, the women and children are better clothed and fed and are saving money'. While there were complaints made about the women, the inquiring officer decided they arose 'out of personal squabbles and may frequently not be true.'<sup>299</sup>

It is difficult to know exactly how representative of Irish opinion the above comments were. The picture painted is not one of religious soldiers and is at variance with their portrayal during the war. On the other hand, there are a few comments on the lack of devotion amongst Irish soldiers during the war itself. Fr. Wrafter, who was sent to Holland against his will and because of his age, commented that 'the old soldier is satisfied with very little religion.' He went on to discuss Catholics who would not go to Mass 'if they can get away with it' and he points out that one man had to be arrested for refusing to attend a church parade.<sup>300</sup> Lieutenant Noel Drury wrote late in 1917, as his regiment, the sixth battalion, the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, neared Jerusalem, that 'Padre O'Carroll held an R.C. service in the gully this morning and there was not a single person there, but he seemed quite oblivious of the fact as he kept his back turned to where they should have been, all the time of the service.'<sup>301</sup> Dungan suggests that Drury may have been anti-Catholic and provides several other examples of anti-Catholic comments made by him. It is important to point out that the criticism of British troops (and especially of

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<sup>299</sup> M. Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, p.178.

<sup>300</sup> J. Wrafter Papers at JAD file 26, F Wrafter to Rev. Nolan, c. Oct. 1918.

<sup>301</sup> Dungan, *They shall grow Not Old*, p.72.

Irishmen joining the army) came from Constitutional Irish Nationalists, like Redmond and Gwynn, while the particularly vicious attacks came from the 'advanced' Nationalists in the Gaelic League and the GAA.

Irish Nationalists had, since the days of O'Connell, been uncomfortable with Irish Catholic men joining the British Army. However, in the majority of cases, these same leaders were keen to praise the bravery of individual Irish soldiers and their attacks were more likely to be aimed at the authorities for not appreciating the true value of the recruits. After the Boer War the anti-recruitment campaigns were aimed to a much greater extent at the recruits themselves and their families and friends. With the outbreak of war in August, there was a totally different view of joining the Army. Those who had been opposed to it in the years after the Boer war were now much more in favour. Redmond and Gwynn both spoke in favour of recruitment and several Irish Party MP's joined up themselves. This change of heart was influenced by the passing of the third Home Rule bill and later on by German atrocities in Belgium.

#### Piety in the families of Irish soldiers

Were Irish soldiers really as immoral and irreligious as suggested by the anti-recruitment campaigns? Lucy and McConville say very little regarding religion, but an examination of the *Irish Messenger* from 1914-1918 suggest that many Irish soldiers came from very devout backgrounds. The *Irish Messenger* is a Jesuit publication and enjoyed a very wide readership in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was, and is, commonly on sale in Catholic Churches

and at a time when Mass attendance was almost 100% throughout Ireland, large numbers subscribed. An examination of the letters sent in by its readers suggest that every month there were hundreds of requests for prayers for the safe return of soldiers who were at the front or on the point of being sent there. While the majority of letters came from the families and parents of these soldiers, it does at least suggest that the men came from devout Catholic families. Furthermore, these letters of request begin to appear in the September 1914 edition of the *Messenger* so they were from the families of regular pre-war soldiers and not from the volunteers for the 'New Armies' or, in this case, 'The Irish Volunteers'. In the October edition the editor commented on 'Petitions innumerable -we received over 140 such letters in a single week- are pouring in on us from the friends of those ordered out to the war asking prayers for their safety and success.'<sup>302</sup> Typical of the type of petition was this one written in September 1914 and published in the *Messenger* in October. 'We humbly ask your prayers and those of the Apostleship that The Sacred Heart of Jesus in his infinite mercy may send back our dear brother unharmed from the war. He has now gone to join his regiment, The Irish Guards. - A Co. Tipperary family.'<sup>303</sup>

Letters of thanksgiving were also sent to the *Messenger* for petitions granted. In December 1914 the editor received the following letter: 'Will you please publish in the *Messenger* my heartfelt thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and his Holy Mother for my having heard from one who was wounded at the war; he is a Protestant but was wearing

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<sup>302</sup> *Irish Messenger*, Oct. 1914, p.544.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct 1914, p.548.



the badge of the Sacred Heart, and I ask prayers for his conversion.<sup>304</sup> In October 1914, two hundred and eighty-four letters and petitions were sent to the *Messenger* and, in May 1915, 144 letters of thanksgiving were received. The majority of these letters came

from the wives of the soldiers recalled in 1914. In November 1914 the following letter was received: 'My husband is attached to the R[oyal] F[ield] Artillery. He is now on his way to the seat of war and it is only prayers that will bring him home safe. I beg your holy prayers. I will get a Mass said every month out of my monthly allowance from the government during his absence abroad and I will perform the nine Fridays devotion in favour of the Sacred Heart if God in his mercy sends him home to me'.<sup>305</sup> Another letter in January 1915 gave thanks also 'when my husband was ordered to the Front, I promised if I heard from him again I would in thanksgiving get it published in the *Messenger*. After weeks of deep anxiety and prayers to the divine Heart, Our Lady and St. Joseph, I heard last week that he was wounded in the first battle and a prisoner. He tells me that he is not too bad with the Germans and his wound is healing. I pray if he returns to me in safety, to get some Masses in thanksgiving. Asking you, Dear Father, to publish this, I remain, A Trusting Soldier's Wife.<sup>306</sup> As noted earlier, the majority came from the 'separation' women (the term applied to the wives of soldiers at the front who received a separation allowance while their men were away) and therefore do not support the advanced Nationalists' view of them as drunken and sexually immoral. The *Messenger* was still

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., Dec. 1914, p.662.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., Nov. 1914, p.604.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., Jan. 1915, p.28.

getting 80-100 per month by the middle of 1918 but, by then, they did not publish any, they were simply listed after the printed letters which now related more and more to 'temperance and conversions', 'means of livelihood', 'health restored' and 'miscellaneous favours'. The changing political situation in Ireland seems to have been felt by the *Messenger* too.

## Chapter 4.

### Challenges

From the beginning of the war in August 1914, Irish Catholic chaplains faced challenges that other chaplains, whether other Irish or Catholic non-Irish, did not have to encounter. Irish Catholic chaplains found themselves in an army and fighting for a cause that their own superiors in the Irish Catholic hierarchy did not necessarily support.

The fact that Austria-Hungary was an enemy in the war proved a problem for some Irish Catholics. The Habsburg Empire was seen as an important Catholic European power for which many Irish soldiers, including Daniel O'Connell's son, had served. There was a great deal of sympathy in Ireland for the Habsburgs after the shooting in Sarajevo and the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart* described it as a 'shocking outrage'. The article went on to describe Franz Ferdinand as a 'devout Catholic'. In 1909 'He unveiled a statue of the Sacred Heart at his palace at Honopischt and before he went to Sarajevo he heard two masses and a sermon by Fr. Fisher SJ [and] he did the novena of the nine first Fridays'.<sup>307</sup> The article went on to say that Archduke's wife, Sophie was a contributor to *The Messenger*. On a more political note, Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick, no supporter of Britain's war effort, was also an admirer of the Habsburg Empire and feared that 'an allied victory in the war would destroy the last Catholic Great Power'.<sup>308</sup> The Bishop of Kilmore spoke in favourable terms about the way he was treated by the Austrian Government while he was stranded in Carlsbad in August 1914 when the war broke out. 'The Austrian

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<sup>307</sup> *Irish Messenger*, September 1914, p.449

<sup>308</sup> P Maume , *Long Gestation*, p.166.

Government and the people of Carlsbad treated us with the utmost consideration and kindness'. His Lordship said he would not mention the barbarities inflicted on Belgians by the Germans' <sup>309</sup> In contrast, there was no such sympathy for the Hapsburg Empire amongst Ulster Protestants. In a letter to the *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, the writer pointed out that Austria was:

The strongest supporter of the Papacy in Europe and, within her dominions, Protestants suffer from several civil disabilities. Austria, in the past, has been largely associated with the persecution of Protestants and it is well to remember that Philip of Spain, the patron of the Inquisition, was a member of the same family as is the Emperor'. <sup>310</sup>

At the outbreak of the war, it is clear that Irish Catholics had some sympathy for Catholic Austria, as they would soon have sympathy for Catholic Belgium.

Catholic Ireland was also aware of the attitude of the Vatican to the war. Before Italy entered the War, Benedict XV published the encyclical *Ad Beatissimi*. In it, he blamed no country for causing the war; rather, it was caused by a loss of Christian wisdom and the self-interest of men and nations. The Pope nominated 7 February 1915 as a day of prayer for peace. The following week, Irish bishops published their Lenten pastoral letters. The majority of them echoed the Pope's plea for peace. Several pastoral letters cited large extracts of the Pope's appeal.

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<sup>309</sup> *Fermanagh Herald*, 3 October 1914.

<sup>310</sup> T. Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland: World War 1 and Partition* (London, 1998), p.59 .

Sympathy for the Habsburg Empire and genuine respect for the Pope were reasons why Irish support for the war effort was not going to be as enthusiastic as in Britain. There were other reasons too. The Archbishop of Dublin, William Walsh, was not a keen supporter of the Irish Party nor of the Liberal Government. He believed that the Liberals favoured secularising education and also that they were a weak government. He was appalled, according to his secretary, by the 'downright treasonable speeches and activities of the highest-placed and more aristocratic members of the Tory governing classes of England and their unqualified support for the Ulster Volunteers'.<sup>311</sup> He further felt that this weakness was clearly demonstrated by the reaction of the government to the 'Curragh Mutiny,' which Curran, Archbishop Walsh's private secretary, described as 'really not a mutiny... it gave the option to the officers of resigning. If you follow the documents, you will see that there was no refusal on the part of Gough and the other officers but that they accepted the alternative so indefensibly offered to them by the weak Asquith government'.<sup>312</sup> Walsh further deplored 'the Irish Party's recruiting campaign and regarded it as an inevitable result of their parliamentary subservience to the Liberals'<sup>313</sup>. He believed that the amending legislation necessary before Home Rule would become law would favour Ulster's exclusion from the rest of Ireland and yet he was surprised that Redmond still gave his support to the Liberals: 'He deplored especially the Party's meeting held in the Mansion House on 25th September, when Asquith, Redmond, Dillon and Devlin were the principal speakers'.<sup>314</sup> This was a major recruiting meeting. He also

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<sup>311</sup> WSBMH. WS. no. 689 Monsignor Curran.(secretary to Archbishop Walsh of Dublin). p.7.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p.11.

maintained contacts with the IRB in Dublin through an Old Fenian, James Collins, and Curran was well acquainted with leading policemen in the city so the Archbishop was well aware of the growing importance of the IRB in Dublin. It should be noted that Curran was also in regular contact with the Irish College in Rome, which was instrumental in advancing Nationalist Ireland's cause in the Vatican. His correspondent in Rome was the vice chancellor, Mgr. John Hagan, who had strong republican sentiments and who later organized the purchase of guns for the IRA during the War of Independence.

#### The Irish bishops who opposed the war

Significantly, Walsh refused to sign an anti-German declaration on 15 December 1914 on the basis that 'it contained a number of sweeping statements of which he had no knowledge as to whether they were accurate or true. For instance, the statement that England had done all it could to avoid war discounted by the resignation of Morley etc.'<sup>315</sup> He further forbade the placing of recruiting posters on the railings of churches in Dublin and did not aid the recruiting campaign in any way.

Walsh was not the only Irish bishop who failed to endorse Britain's war effort. Bishop Dwyer of Limerick favoured neither the Irish Party nor the war effort. He first came to prominence as a Nationalist in 1915. In November, a group of Irishmen, embarking at Liverpool for the USA, were attacked and mobbed as shirkers by English civilians and the

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., p.11.

crew refused to man the ship on which they intended to travel. This attack drew the following response from Dr O'Dwyer: 'Why should those Irish lads be forced to join the British Army? What is the war to them? Their crime is that they are not ready to die for England. Why should they? What have they or their forebears ever got from England that they should die for her? This war may be just or unjust, but any fair-minded man will admit that it is England's war not Ireland's'.<sup>316</sup>

As noted earlier, O'Dwyer was no friend of the Irish Party and had sympathies with Austria-Hungary. Also, in the 1880's he had opposed the Plan of Campaign of the Irish Parliamentary party which was aimed at getting rents reduced. O'Dwyer believed the plan was morally wrong. He and John Dillon argued fiercely about it. Dwyer opposed the 'boycotting and intimidation' while Dillon claimed that O'Dwyer was on the side of the oppressor. The Nationalist press had supported Dillon on the issue. In the end, the Vatican agreed with O'Dwyer. Leo XIII condemned the Plan of Campaign although it had been supported by Walsh and also Cardinal Logue of Armagh. As a result, Leo became deeply unpopular in Ireland. O'Dwyer had the reputation of being a 'Castle Bishop', a bishop under the influence of the government. In reality, the Vatican's stance owed much more to the British government's decision to use George Errington to influence the appointment of Irish bishops. Errington was an English Catholic who owned land in Ireland but spent the winter months in Rome. He disliked Parnell and also Archbishop Croke. In this case Leo supported the British government against Irish nationalism, largely due to Errington's representations. Another reason for O'Dwyer's opposition to the 'Plan of

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<sup>316</sup>WSBMH, WS. no.1407, Thomas J. Lavin.

Campaign' was British support for the Vatican against the Italian Government's intention of confiscating papal property.<sup>317</sup> O'Dwyer, like Walsh, was suspicious of the Liberal alliance because he, too, felt that they intended to suppress religion in schools and pave the way to secularisation in a Home Rule Ireland. During the Parnell split, O'Dwyer favoured Parnell as he feared Dillon would be an 'immediate danger to the faith and religious faith of the people and their loyalty to Rome'<sup>318</sup>. This support for Parnell was unusual as the majority of the Irish hierarchy opposed Parnell as an adulterer. Some were a little concerned about Dillon being anti-clerical and this was noted by the Bishop of Elphin, Dr. John Cleary. O'Dwyer, then, had a reputation of being a maverick both in political terms and in the Irish hierarchy. Finally, it is worth pointing out that no secular priests from the Limerick diocese became army chaplains in the First World War. While it would be wrong to attribute this totally to Dr. Dwyer's attitude, his anti-war stance hardly encouraged parish clergy to enlist. On the other hand at least two priests in the Limerick diocese were very involved in the Irish Volunteers and after the Easter Rising in 1916, General Maxwell, the Military Governor, requested that they be 'silenced' by Dr. Dwyer. He replied to Maxwell on 12 May shortly after the last executions of the rebel leaders had taken place in Dublin was published in several newspapers and became a rallying call for Nationalist Ireland. Refusing to do anything to 'silence' the priests, he went on to tell Maxwell;

Personally, I regard your action with horror, and I believe it has outraged the conscience of the country. Then the deporting of

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<sup>317</sup> Aan de Weil, *Catholic Church in Ireland*, pp.257-260.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*,p.63.



hundreds or even thousands without a trial of any kind seems to me an abuse of power as fatuous as it is arbitrary; and altogether your regime has been one of the worst and blackest chapters in the history of the misgovernment of this country'.<sup>319</sup>

Cardinal Logue of Armagh was not a wholehearted supporter of all aspects of Britain's war effort either. An Irish Nationalist, he was no republican, nor was he a supporter of Sinn Fein. He did not wholeheartedly support the IPP's stance on the war, nor did he encourage recruitment into the army. In short, Logue believed strongly in the British Empire but he felt that Catholics were not treated equally within it. This view was made public in a speech in 1902, on the coronation of Edward VII. Part of the coronation oath was an attack on transubstantiation and on the cult of the Virgin Mary. While agreeing that the oath was a product of history, he felt that Catholics were treated as second class citizens within the empire. He was also concerned about the high levels of emigration in recent times and linked this to poor recruitment figures as he pointed out that those most likely to join the army had in fact emigrated.<sup>320</sup> This view had been supported by Sir William Butler in 1878.<sup>321</sup> Logue, like Walsh, he distrusted the Liberal government and particularly its policy on Ireland. Significantly, he did not congratulate Redmond on the passing of Home Rule in September 1914. He was very concerned about the Partition of Ireland which an amending bill might create, as his archdiocese was predominantly in Ulster. On the other hand, he did encourage Catholic priests to act as

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<sup>319</sup> WSBMH, WS. no.1407, Thomas J. Lavin.

<sup>320</sup> J. Aan de Wiel, *The Catholic Church in Ireland 1914-1918*, p.9

<sup>321</sup> E. M. Spiers, 'Army Organisation and Society', in *A Military History of Ireland*, ed. T. Bartlett and K. Jeffrey, p.337

chaplains and seems to have made no real attempt to convince the other bishops of his views, a factor which helps to account for the failure of the Irish hierarchy to voice a common policy on the war.

### The Irish bishops who supported the war

Other Irish bishops did, however, support both the war effort and John Redmond. In the West of Ireland, Bishop O'Dea of Galway resolved that Irishmen should support the allied war cause: 'He hoped that every Irish Catholic, whose politics had not been utterly perverted, would join [the army] and it was his earnest hope that the contribution in blood made by Irishmen to strike down arrogant militarism, would not be a wasted treasure.'<sup>322</sup> Likewise, the Archbishop of Tuam declared 'You will rally to the flag, not by compulsion or coercion but from a sense of duty as becomes free men... the man who strikes a blow against Prussia, strikes a blow for justice and freedom... every acre of land acquired by the Germans was achieved through injustice and rapine'.<sup>323</sup> He went on to add that those whose political views were against England brought disgrace upon their country and themselves. Similarly, Bishop Gilmartin of Clonfert said that while Christ's way 'was to love your enemies, do good to those who hate you' that did not mean that 'we are not to defend our rights within the laws of God'.<sup>324</sup> Bishop Foley of Kildare and Leighin said in August 1914: 'It becomes the duty of us... to come to the aid of the armies

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<sup>322</sup> W.Henry, *Galway and the Great War*, p.58.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

which are fighting on the side of justice and right'<sup>325</sup>. Based on such utterances, Aan de Weil claims that by the end of 1914, out of 27 bishops, 21 were in favour of the war, 3 neutral, 1 ambivalent (Logue) and 2 opposed.<sup>326</sup> All this, however, contrasted greatly with the Catholic church in Britain, where there was total support for the war effort, and also with the Church of Ireland and the Irish Presbyterian church, both of whom were completely behind the war.

### The contrasts with the English Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland

In Britain, pastoral letters encouraged enlistment as, indeed, did some bishops in Ireland. The Archbishop of Liverpool wrote 'We are all convinced of the justice of the cause for which the allies are fighting, and are persuaded of the necessity of securing at the cost of men and money, a sure and lasting peace'.<sup>327</sup> The Bishop of Middlesboro compared allied soldiers to Christian martyrs: 'When we see these men bravely facing the perils and hardships of war and, as frequently happens, pouring out their lifeblood in the cause they defend, we are led to the conclusion that men that are capable of such self-abnegation when a worthy object is put before them are also capable of the highest and noblest Christian ideals. In a word, they are the stuff out of which a Christian martyr is made.'<sup>328</sup> The theme of martyrdom was echoed by the Archbishop of Cardiff: 'Dying for

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<sup>325</sup> Aan de Weil, *Catholic Church in Ireland*, p11.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>327</sup> Pastoral Letter from the Archbishop of Liverpool. June 1916.

<sup>328</sup> Lenten Pastoral Letter from the Bishop of Middlesbrough, 1916. It should be noted that Bishop Lacy was born in Ireland in 1841 and educated both in Ushant and the English College in Rome.

one's country is, according to Catholic teaching, real martyrdom'.<sup>329</sup> High-flown themes were mentioned, too, by the Archbishop of Glasgow:

Our duty is to throw ourselves with heart and soul into the new crusade against Paganism for it is Paganism we have to fight against with its characteristic disregard for human life and property, of law and justice, of honesty and truth, of childhood and womanhood, of art and learning; with its resolve to trample on all opposed to its tyranny; its cynical maxim that the end justifies the mean.<sup>330</sup>

The English Catholic view was explained in a booklet published anonymously in 1916. The author pointed out that when the Great War broke out, 'It was not surprising that Catholics should have flocked to arms for the defence of the country they loved- and loved not because it has admittedly treated them so generously and respected their devotion but because it is their country and the instincts of patriotism are so deeply in rooted in all who bear the Catholic name'.<sup>331</sup> Support for the war and encouragement to enlist in the army was the universal attitude of the English Catholic Church. In Ireland,

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<sup>329</sup> Archbishop of Cardiff, from a tribute to Canon Gwydhir OSB, who was drowned while serving on the hospital ship *Rohita*.

<sup>330</sup> Archbishop of Glasgow, from a sermon at St Andrews Glasgow, 21 Oct.1915.

<sup>331</sup> Anon. '*Catholics in the Empire and the War*', Burns and Oates Ltd. London,1916.p2

absolute support for the war came much more from the Anglican Church than from the Catholic hierarchy.

As early as September 1914, Archbishop Crozier, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh, was calling for recruits. The *Church of Ireland Gazette* reported that he appealed to the men of Ireland for recruits. This was echoed on the same Sunday by the Bishop of Ossory: 'The call of the hour is a call to arms, our young men must answer it. There is no question of politics- the country is in danger and you must put the country before politics... be sure that the one test of a good Irishman at the moment is loyalty to his country which involves loyalty to the King'.<sup>332</sup> The Church of Ireland's wholehearted support for the war left many unhappy with their Catholic fellow countrymen. There were suggestions that 'Home Rule was passed only to get more Irishmen into the army' and allusions were made to 'the most unsatisfactory response of the recruiting appeal in Ireland'.<sup>333</sup> There was also criticism of the Irish Volunteers: 'It is tempting to contrast the unconditional offer for military service of the Ulster Volunteers with the conditional offer of the National Volunteers... can the manhood of Roman Catholic Ireland remain unmoved by the burning of Louvain and the murder of its priests'?<sup>334</sup>

Amongst the Presbyterian community in Ireland there was enormous support for the war effort. The Moderator of the Presbyterian Assembly (in this case Dr. Hamill, who had replaced Dr Bingham for the year 1914) spoke of the 'Feelings of horror at the terrible

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<sup>332</sup> *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 11 Sept. 1914.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 Sept. 1914.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 18<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1914.

war which has been forced on our country by a cruel and unscrupulous foe'.<sup>335</sup> Here, too, there was criticism of the lack of support for the war effort as evidenced by the recruiting figures. It was argued that recruitment to the forces was poor in rural areas- 'recruitment had been successful in urban areas. It is to be deplored that in rural districts, our young men have not realised the duty to their country as they should have done. It seems quite the exception when farmers' sons join the flag'.<sup>336</sup> With regard to chaplains for Presbyterian soldiers, it was noted that, out of 20,000 soldiers in the 10<sup>th</sup> Division, 2,000 were Presbyterians. 700 others were at the Curragh at that time. Five ministers were appointed to act as chaplains through the Rev. Dr. McClean, a church representative on the advisory Presbyterian committee of the War Office.

Divisions within the Irish Catholic hierarchy on the war were mirrored within the Irish priesthood at large. Many priests supported the war to the extent of attending recruiting meetings and speaking in favour of enlistment. Some went so far as to support Redmond's Woodenbridge speech which encouraged the Irish Volunteers to join the army. Fr. P.H. Maguire of Boho, Co. Fermanagh, suggested that the volunteers should go abroad: 'We live in an age of militarism [and the Volunteers] may well have to go away from their own homes, but if that should happen they were prepared for it'.<sup>337</sup> Support for Britain also came from Fr. Thomas Duffy of Lisnaskea who told his parishioners that 'England's difficulty was Ireland's too', and in the neighbouring Newtownbutler, Fr. J. R.

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<sup>335</sup> *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church*. 1915, p.1085

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1122.

<sup>337</sup> *Fermanagh Herald*, 3 Oct. 1914.

Maguire compared Ireland to Belgium in an effort to encourage support for Britain's war effort.<sup>338</sup>

On 28 October 1914 the *Fermanagh Herald* reported a speech by Cardinal Logue in Dundalk, in which he demanded more chaplains for Irish regiments. At this point, his main aim was to convince the War Office to increase the number of Catholic chaplains to the BEF. At Dundalk, he claimed that there were 'Many priests burning to go to the front to minister to their dying Catholic fellow countrymen'.<sup>339</sup> He went on to explain that he was not demanding permanent employment for the priests and also commented on the 'infidel government of France who had... deprived the army of chaplains but they left the priests free to go to the front as volunteers'.<sup>340</sup> On the other hand, Logue seemed to have difficulties with the number of priests available in Ireland and he even claimed that he had never been so short of them. Ireland's clerical resources were stretched as Irish missionaries were called upon 'to replace many of their French and German counterparts in the African mission fields'.<sup>341</sup> As late as 1917, Logue was alluding to this chronic shortage of priests: 'There is a great scarcity of priests in Ireland'.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 22 August 1914

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 24 Oct. 1914.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 24 Oct. 1914.

<sup>341</sup> M. Snape, *Royal Army Chaplains Department*, (Woodbridge 2008). p194.

<sup>342</sup> T. Johnstone and Hagerty, *Cross on the Sword*, p186.

In 1914, there was certainly a real shortage of chaplains. On the retreat from Mons, German chaplains had to tend the wounded Munsters and bury their dead after the battle of Etreux.<sup>343</sup> At this early point of the war, the main demand was for the War Office to allow more Catholic chaplains. Both Irish Catholic opinion, as represented by the *Catholic Herald*, and English Catholic opinion, represented by the *Tablet*, demanded more Catholic chaplains be sent to the front for the Expeditionary Force. It was felt, in contrast, that the New Armies were well provided for.<sup>344</sup> By November-December 1914, a hundred per cent increase in the number of Chaplains had been approved. The problem now, and for the rest of the war, was how to fill the vacancies. Letters from serving chaplains underline the shortages and occasionally hint at their causes. Fr. Henry Gill, writing to his provincial in February 1915, quoted a major of the Royal Irish Rifles on the benefits of having a good chaplain for both the morale and general attitude of the men, Gill pointing out that 'More chaplains are needed'.<sup>345</sup> Later on, in November 1915, Gill again noted shortages of chaplains and suggested that he was not really suited to the life of one, either by temperament or by age and that he would like to pass the burden to younger priests: 'It is a pity the younger priests do not volunteer – I hear of cases where bishops will not let their best men go and so there are people like myself, who are neither suited by age or training, to have to take up the burden'.<sup>346</sup> By 1917, Gill was still discussing

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<sup>343</sup> Tom Johnstone, *Orange Green and Khaki*, p33.

<sup>344</sup> Johnstone and Hagarty, *Cross on the Sword*. p86.

<sup>345</sup> H.Gill papers, JAD box 25, H. Gill to Rev. Nolan 18 Feb.1915.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Nov.1915.



shortages. He claimed that ‘there is a shortage of over 100 Catholic Chaplains in France alone... I wonder would it be possible to raise Catholic opinion on the matter’.<sup>347</sup>

These views were supported by Fr. Wrafter SJ of the Munster Fusiliers, who insisted that chaplains ‘are overworked and have to help with other battalions.’<sup>348</sup> As late as 1917, Fr. Doyle of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers complained about the lack of Catholic chaplains and even suggested to his provincial that American Jesuits could be invited to become chaplains. He also mentioned ‘The humiliation of the failure to get sufficient priests’.<sup>349</sup> However, in February 1916 Logue had issued an appeal for younger clergy to volunteer for active service; within a month, 36 Irish priests had been commissioned. In June 1916, Fr. Gill expressed his dissatisfaction with Logue’s argument about the shortages of priests in Ireland. He argued that priests at home should take more than one Mass on Sunday and that chaplains to convents could be replaced by other men. He also made an interesting observation about the motivation of some young priests: ‘When I was on leave, I got a hint that some young priests were unwilling to come out because of political reasons. I hope that this is not true, would it not be a terrible sign?’<sup>350</sup> Yet Logue continued to claim that there were plenty of young Irish priests available. Writing to Bishop Amigo of Southwark, he said ‘There are plenty of good earnest priests in Ireland

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 27 Jan. 1917.

<sup>348</sup> Wrafter Papers JAD file 26, F. Wrafter to Rev. Nolan 10 July 1916.

<sup>349</sup> W Doyle Papers JAD, file 9, W. Doyle to Rev. Nolan 26 Nov.1917.

<sup>350</sup> H.Gill papers JAD box 25, H. Gill to Rev. Nolan, 21 Jan 1917.

longing to go out and help our soldiers'.<sup>351</sup> Certainly, as the war wore on, the situation on the Western Front improved and, in a letter to *The Irish Catholic* in May 1917, Fr. Doyle wrote: 'With all the spirited help now at our disposal, even in the very firing line, we may be fairly confident that few, if any, of our Catholic men are unprepared to meet almighty God'.<sup>352</sup> Nevertheless, Fr. Browne still felt that there was work for more chaplains-'We are all kept going night and morning and there is plenty of room for more'.<sup>353</sup> By 1917, the ongoing scarcity of chaplains even prompted a 'Memorial to the Irish hierarchy' in which 120 Catholic notables appealed to Irish Catholic bishops to give 'encouragement and direction to the young and active Clergy at home'.<sup>354</sup>

There were still others who clearly viewed the war in the traditional republican way of 'England's difficulty being Ireland's opportunity'. As I have noted earlier, Irish Catholic chaplains at the Front were very often Irish Nationalists and were content to demonstrate their Irishness through the unofficial use of green flags and other Irish insignia which was usually tolerated by local commanders.<sup>355</sup> Some Irish priests, on the other hand, would not support the war effort in any way, which is not surprising considering the divisions in the hierarchy. Some went a great deal further and several

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<sup>351</sup> Johnstone and Hagerty .*Cross on the Sword* p.90.

<sup>352</sup> L. Cooper , 'Saintly Fr Doyle ' in L Cooper (ed), *With God on Our side*' (London, 1983) p.178.

<sup>353</sup> F Browne papers JAD file 9, F Browne to Rev. Nolan 21 August 1916.

<sup>354</sup> Johnstone and Hagerty , *Cross on the Sword* p.98.

<sup>355</sup> Gleeson papers, ADA, Diary 9 May 1915 and Feilding, *War Letters* p.97.

were very actively involved in events like the Easter Rising. Those who were involved later gave statements to the Bureau of Military History.

In his witness statement, Fr. Aloysius (a Capuchin) referred to the role played by himself and others of his order during the 1916 rising. 'Some of our Fathers were in attendance at the North Dublin Union and the Richmond Hospital as well as the rebel-held Fr. Matthew Hall (a rebel hospital)... The Capuchins were also active in the surrender negotiations.'<sup>356</sup> At the surrender, Frs. Augustine and Aloysius took messages to the relatives of the surrendered volunteers. Fr. Aloysius expressed sympathy for the volunteers in describing an incident with looters: 'Side by side with the manly and straightforward conduct of those who had borne the brunt of the trying week, I thought their conduct (the looters) wretched and despicable and I did not mince my words.'<sup>357</sup> Fr. Pdraig de Brun was a close friend of Sean Mac Dermott, one of the leaders executed after the Rising. In his witness statement he felt that the Catholic Church was beginning to support Sinn Fein by 1918 as a consequence of the conscription crisis. He believed that the decision made by the Maynooth bishops' meeting in May 1918, to send the students home, was because 'it looked as if there might be a fight. It was partly to give the students a chance to help'.<sup>358</sup> Indeed, later on he argued that episcopal opposition to the republican cause was not very serious. He related a meeting he had with Dr. Finnegan of Kilmore in 1917 during the Longford by-election where de Brun was working for Arthur

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<sup>356</sup> WSBMH. WS. 200 . Fr Aloysius. p2.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>358</sup> WSBMH. WS. 729. Fr. Pdraig de Brun. p.4.

Griffith, the Sinn Fein candidate. Finnegan told him: 'I forbid you under pain of censure to take any further part in the election in my diocese'.<sup>359</sup> However, De Brun went on to point out that very little of the constituency lay in Kilmore diocese anyway, thus the threat was almost meaningless. Jerome Aan De Wiel, does, however, maintain that Finnegan was one of the few genuinely anti-Sinn Fein bishops. Fr. Murphy of Clonroche in Co. Wexford had been involved in Irish Volunteer activity in the period before the Rising. He brought rifles to Dublin for use in the rising and was later stopped and arrested with a consignment of shotguns in his car. His bishop told him 'Well then...all you can do is to go to gaol and do something for your country like your namesake of '98'.<sup>360</sup>

Canon Wall of Drumcollogher, Co. Limerick, was a member of a local organising committee of the Volunteers in the pre-rising period and he claimed there were several priests on the same committee. He also said that he had feared incompetent local leadership and had asked MacNeill, the president of the Irish Volunteers, for a 'competent man to take charge'.<sup>361</sup> Another priest, Fr. Patrick O'Hegarty, with connections to the republican movement, enjoyed telling of an incident during a recruiting meeting in Mayo. It happened after Michael O'Leary of the Irish Guards had spoken. O'Leary had won a V.C. in France. His father was also present and was asked if he was surprised at his son's achievement: 'Musha, I knew it was in me boy; how could he escape it all. The O'Learys

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p.4

<sup>360</sup> W.S.B.M.H. WS. 1277. Fr Murphy. p1.

<sup>361</sup> WSBMH. WS. 1206. Canon Wall. p2

were Fenians and beat the hell out of the English every time and every place'.<sup>362</sup> Fr. Murphy of Clonroche later claimed that there were a dozen priests in the diocese of Ferns, 'not one of them one whittle less of a rebel than me'.<sup>363</sup> Fr. O'Daly of Co. Tyrone was perhaps more unusual in that he claimed to be a member of the IRB. The 19<sup>th</sup> century church had excommunicated Fenians and Dr. Moriarity of Kerry pronounced that 'Hell is not hot enough nor eternity long enough to punish these miscreants'.<sup>364</sup> It is unusual then to find priests involved in the movement but O'Daly claimed that there were two others in 'The North'.<sup>365</sup>

#### The chaplains in German prisoner of war camps

Other chaplains ministering to Irish soldiers are noteworthy. Two civilian priests were sent as chaplains to Limburg POW camp in Germany. One was an Irish Dominican, Fr. Crotty. The other was an American priest, Fr. Nicholson. There are a series of letters in the National Library of Ireland from Roger Casement to Nicholson clearly illustrating Nicholson's role in attempting to organize the Irish prisoners there into an Irish Brigade to fight for Germany against Britain. While a very few did join, the majority were very hostile to Casement himself and later on to Nicholson too. By February 1915 Casement told Nicholson 'it is not any use I think, discussing the future of Ireland with the men in Limburg there is none that would see things as you and I do. It takes men of other upbringing. These men cannot understand much of the situation- they are hypnotised by

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<sup>362</sup> WSBMH. WS. 1606, Fr. O'Hagarty p6.

<sup>363</sup> WSBMH. WS. 1277, Fr. Murphy. p4.

<sup>364</sup> D.A Kerr, 'Priests, Pikes and Patriots' in S. Brown and D. Miller (eds), *Piety and Power in Ireland 1760-1960* (Dublin, 2000), p. 37.

<sup>365</sup> WSBMH. WS. 235, Canon O'Daly, p1.

the words "Home Rule".<sup>366</sup> Nicholson, in the only letter to Casement in the archive, showed a much greater concern for the day to day welfare of the prisoners than his correspondent. In a letter of 30 January 1915, Nicholson complained of the harshness of life in the camp. His whole letter is devoted to the problems of the men: 'The men are being ill treated in the camp. Private xxxxx (he had requested that his name not be mentioned for fear of reprisals) sect 23 who was wounded five times was given seven days on bread and water although unable to work... The men are without socks resulting in sore feet... there are reduced rations on Sunday (no work on Sunday)'. He ended the letter by questioning whether prisoners should be made to work at all and asked Casement to get full rations restored.<sup>367</sup>

Fr. Crotty appeared to have the trust of Casement, for in a letter, undated but probably written in mid-January 1915, he told Nicholson to 'consult Fr. Crotty in all difficulties' and then advised 'I should be very guarded to everyone but Fr. Crotty and his friend and mine, Fr Berkessel, the parish priest of Baldinsein. Fr. Berkessel has been in Ireland.'<sup>368</sup> Crotty, however, was not really supportive of the idea of an Irish Brigade. He appears to have been much more interested in the welfare of the prisoners and not just the Irish ones. This is the view of Dennis Gwynn who wrote a biography of Casement.<sup>369</sup> He aroused the suspicion of the German camp officials and at least one, an interpreter,

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<sup>366</sup> Letter from Casement to Nicholson, 25 Feb. 1915 in National library of Ireland (Manuscripts) MS 8743

<sup>367</sup> Letter from Nicholson to Casement in National library of Ireland (Manuscripts) MS 8743

30 Jan. 1915.

<sup>368</sup> J. Nicholson Papers, National Library of Ireland MS 8743 Casement to Nicholson. Dec. 1914.

<sup>369</sup> A Roth, 'Sir Roger Casement and the Irish Brigade', *Irish Sword* Vol.XIX. p 313.

believed him to be an English spy. The German authorities decided to get rid of Crotty by involving the President of the Irish College in Rome who wrote to Crotty on the pretence that he could no longer be kept from his real functions in Rome. Crotty, however, was reluctant to return to Italy which was now at war as part of the Entente, so he wrote to Matthias Erzberger, leader of the German Centre Party (Zentrum), a Catholic party, and to Princess Blucher asking them to intervene to prevent his transfer to Rome. He was successful and the German authorities allowed him remain at Limburg. They did, however, decide to have him monitored. The American ambassador, Gerard, spoke of the 'wonderful work' done by Crotty and Crotty himself said to Princess Blucher that 'an attempt was made to form an Irish Brigade from the prisoners. I gave no support to the movement, nor did I oppose it.'<sup>370</sup>

In an undated letter to the superior of his order, Crotty painted a picture of life for the Irish prisoners in Limburg. In his account, there were prisoner exchanges where Catholic prisoners were returned to Ireland in return for German Catholics. He noted that the Irish prisoners were 'filled with respectful gratitude to Benedict to whose intervention they owe their deliverance'.<sup>371</sup> In his description of Limburg, there were High Masses on Feast days, followed by processions around the camp. Twenty-nine prisoners died and were given full military honours by the Germans who 'saluted the minute the corpse entered the tomb.'<sup>372</sup> In Crotty's opinion, the German military authorities were helpful

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., p318.

<sup>371</sup> T.Crotty papers , National Library of Ireland, MS 18584, T. Crotty to Tres-Reverend Pere General Cormier O.P.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., p.3.

and the Irish prisoners were treated well. They were given the same food as the German guards. While this may have been true of Limburg, another Irish soldier, captured in April 1918, constantly complained about the food, which consisted of 'cabbage soup and cabbage water with some bread and was never enough to sustain those at work'.<sup>373</sup> However, Crotty's favourable writings on the Germans might well have had something to do with his wish to remain in Limburg and his reluctance to return to Italy for fear of being handed over to the British.

Significantly, one of those prisoners who did join the Irish brigade, T.A. Quinlisk, claimed that Crotty actually prevented men from joining.<sup>374</sup> The Irish Brigade was a failure in that only about fifty men joined. Most of the Irish soldiers in Limburg were regular troops captured in the battles of 1914. As professional soldiers, they were suspicious of republican politics and loyal to their oaths. One camp inmate said of Nicholson that he 'perverted every influence that belonged to him on account of his status as a priest to persuade the prisoners to perjure themselves'.<sup>375</sup> Clearly, the loyalty of the soldiers had been badly underestimated by Casement and the Germans. Quinlisk even maintained that 'the Munster Fusiliers were more loyal than the English soldiers'.<sup>376</sup>

In conclusion, then, the Irish Catholic church did not support Britain's war effort in the same way as did the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian church in Ireland or indeed

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<sup>373</sup> M O'hUanachain, 'Diary of Charles Mills RMF, A few notes on German Treatment'. XV.159-176 at p.165.

<sup>374</sup> A Roth, 'Roger Casement' p318

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., p. 319.



the Catholic church in the rest of Great Britain. For a variety of reasons, some Irish prelates and priests actively worked against the war effort while others supported it. Whatever else, the Irish church, from its hierarchy to its parish priests, was deeply divided on the war, a factor that can only have had a negative impact on the number of priests who volunteered for chaplaincy work in the British army at the time.

## Conclusion

The reputation of the Catholic chaplain was enhanced as a result of the performance of individual priests during the war. Writers such as Robert Graves rated them much higher than their Anglican colleagues, mainly because they were allowed to go into the front line whereas, in the early stages of the war, the Anglicans were not. Guy Chapman was also very disparaging of the Anglican chaplains who, he felt, had little to offer the men spiritually when compared to Roman Catholic priests.<sup>377</sup> More recently, Jane Leonard and Myles Dungan, continue to highlight the early ban on Anglican chaplains in the front line, a ban lifted early in the war, and one which went unheeded by several Anglican priests.<sup>378</sup>

However, it is also clear that Catholic writers were very quick to publicise the achievements of Catholic chaplains in Ireland and further afield. This situation benefitted the Catholic community whose loyalty, patriotism and bravery could thus be presented as beyond question. It also supported the view that Britain was united in the war effort and, in particular, that the deeply divisive Irish problem, which seemed to be about to erupt into civil war in the summer of 1914, had been postponed for the duration. The ideal of 'national unity' was, in fact, echoed by the writer of *Catholics of the British Empire and the War*, when he quoted a leading French statesman:

'There are neither Socialists nor Radicals nor Freethinkers

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<sup>377</sup> R. Homes, *Tommy*, p.514

<sup>378</sup> J. Leonard . *Catholic Chaplaincy*, pp 10-13 and M. Dungan, *They shall Grow not Old*, pp.61-65.

nor Catholics, there are only Frenchmen'. It may also be said with truth of England in this war that 'there are neither Catholics nor Protestants, there are only Britons'.<sup>379</sup>

Nevertheless, the image of Ireland supporting Britain in her hour of need and presenting a united front against the German enemy was often a long way from reality. The crisis of the third Home Rule bill in the summer of 1914, with its overtones of approaching civil war, was to overshadow Irish involvement in the Great War. The Irish divisions were, in fact, based solidly on the politics of Home Rule and Unionism. This was particularly true of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> divisions and religious difference played an important part in the 36<sup>th</sup> which was largely drawn from the pre-war Ulster Volunteers. By the same token, time and again Catholic chaplains emphasised their 'Irishness'. This could be seen with Fr. Gleeson and his comments on the flags carried by the 2nd Munster Fusiliers. It was further noted by Feilding regarding the 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers. Fr. Doyle's famous sermon before the beginning of the Third Battle of Ypres, so admired by General Hickie, was in fact inspired by Irishmen fighting in the French army against the British in the eighteenth century. Fr. Doyle even happily recounted soldiers of the Royal Irish Fusiliers firing on their English comrades because they had panicked and fled from a German strongpoint.<sup>380</sup>

Another matter that exacerbated this disunity was the administration of the Chaplains' Department. This issue is noted on several occasions in the letters of almost all

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<sup>379</sup> Anon. *Catholics of the British Empire and the War*, p.5.

<sup>380</sup> L. Cooper (ed). *God on our Side*, p.187.

the chaplains and seems to have been of concern to Irish bishops too. Fr. McRory's criticism of Cardinal Bourne is apparent at many levels, as is his condemnation of the way in which the war was being run. He blamed Bourne for the fact that Catholic chaplains were not being properly paid and were not pensionable, unlike their Protestant counterparts. He also blamed Bourne for getting the Catholic religion a bad name when, during the Boer War, Bourne had sent out 'drunken priests' who were, he argued, volunteers and not commissioned chaplains. 'Bourne however blamed the commissioned chaplains and asked Rome to close down the Catholic Chaplains dept.'<sup>381</sup> He also accused Bourne of suggesting to the War Office that 'even the commissioned chaplains were unsuitable and... he told the War Office to cut their salaries and prevented them from resigning their commissions'.<sup>382</sup> However, McRory's fundamental complaint, seems to have been that Bourne damaged the status of Catholic priests in the army. He contrasted Bourne with Bishop Grant, who fought for twenty years to improve the status of Catholic chaplains in the army in the nineteenth century. He further blamed Bourne for the shortage of Catholic chaplains on hospital ships which, he claimed, was the 'result of Cardinal Bourne's criminal blundering about the Chaplains' Department'.<sup>383</sup>

Other chaplains seem to have felt the same way as McRory with regard to chaplaincy business. Fr. F. Browne believed that attempts were being made to have him removed. These attempts were of a conspiratorial nature as Browne wrote to his

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<sup>381</sup> McRory Papers, PRONI, Diaries, Book 2, p. 100.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p.100.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., p.101.

Provincial that 'certain wires were being pulled to displace him'.<sup>384</sup> Fr. Henry Gill also noted the friction in the Chaplains' Department because the Church of England eventually got 'a bishop of their own to run their show'. This annoyed both Dr. Simms as well as the Roman Catholics who supported him.<sup>385</sup> Gill also complained in broader terms about 'the muddle in Westminster' and referred to Fr. Rawlinson as 'simply a kind of head clerk in the office of the principle[sic] Chaplain who has his time taken up with all sorts of non-conformists with whom we are bunched now... no wonder the bishops of Ireland as well as England are at loggerheads with Westminster.'<sup>386</sup> Fr. Wrafter, writing from Scheveningast camp in Holland, where he was appointed chaplain against his will, commented that the 'Chaplains' Department is simply hopeless, they do nothing and they know nothing'.<sup>387</sup> Even Dr. William Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin, confessed to being mystified by the workings of the Chaplains' Department. In a letter to Fr F. Gleeson, he was clearly surprised that some chaplains could sign up for two years while others were made to sign up indefinitely. He suggested that the appointment of an *Episcopus Castrensis* might be a useful reform.<sup>388</sup> Naturally, and to cap all of this, the Irish hierarchy were generally unhappy with Cardinal Bourne's power to appoint all Catholic chaplains to the army, Irish as well as English.

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<sup>384</sup> F. Browne papers JAD file 9, F Brown Rev. Nolan 15 April 1916.

<sup>385</sup> H Gill papers, JAD box 25, Diary p.56.

<sup>386</sup> H.Gill papers, JAD box 25 from H Gill to Rev. Nolan 27 Jan. 1917.

<sup>387</sup> J. Wrafter papers JAD from J. Wrafter to Rev. Nolan, 27 June 1918.

<sup>388</sup> RP, W. Walsh to F. Gleeson, (not dated) .

It was not simply in the administration of the Chaplains' Department that there was animosity and disunity. Far more serious was the Irish Catholic chaplains' conviction that Irish soldiers were not being given due credit for their efforts and sacrifices. Several chaplains commented on what they believed to be a lack of fairness on the part of the military authorities in dealing with Irish Catholic troops. Fr. Mc Rory in particular was very critical of the British army's attitude to the Irish: 'Few in the regular army are friendly to Ireland - it would not pay them, anti-Irish feeling pervades military circles.'<sup>389</sup> This view of McRory's possibly contained some truth. The Home Rule crisis of 1912-14 had exposed divisions in British society as well as in Ireland and the so called Curragh Mutiny in 1914 had clearly shown that the leadership of the British forces in Ireland was on the side of the Ulster Unionists. Even Kitchener had been much more favourable to Carson's demands that the UVF form an 'Ulster Division' in the army than he was to Redmond's for an 'Irish Brigade'.

McRory's complaints concerned the lack of Catholic officers in Catholic regiments and what he felt were excessive punishments meted out to Irish soldiers. He was also irritated by the failure of the authorities to reward Irish Catholic soldiers who had made great efforts and sacrifices. He cited the case of the Royal Irish Rifles at Neuve Chapelle where he argued that the army 'deliberately concealed the heroism of the Irish Rifles... the other Irish regiments are treated in a similar manner by deliberately concealing what the Irish soldiers have done and are doing.'<sup>390</sup> McRory cited the King's birthday Honours

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<sup>389</sup> McRory Papers, PRONI, Diary Book 2, pp. 29-33.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., p.40.

to support his claim that the Irish regiments were disadvantaged when it came to rewards.

Other chaplains tended to agree with much of what McRory was saying. The Franciscan Fr. Bonaventure Bradley noted that 'The Irish require no encouragement to fight, others do... [they] have done wonders in this war but little is said about it.'<sup>391</sup> Fr. Henry Gill, writing in his diary on 17 June 1915, mentioned that 'the 18<sup>th</sup>. Royal Irish [Royal Irish Regiment] had almost been destroyed in a gas attack and had held their ground when others gave way, yet not a word of praise did they get. Credit is given to others who did less well but never a word for the Irish'.<sup>392</sup> Fr Gill noted too that, after a particularly successful trench raid where one hundred and twenty-five 'German Guards' were taken prisoner, a well-known correspondent of the Daily [ ] referred to a 'good piece of work by the North Country men'.<sup>393</sup> After the 1916 Rising, he complained of being in an Irish regiment, lost in an English army corps where 'we never get any praise.'<sup>394</sup>

Fr. William Doyle's biographer, Monsignor Alfred O'Rahilly, writing after the war, believed that Doyle should have been awarded the Victoria Cross but was overlooked because the 'Triple disqualification of being an Irishman, a Catholic and a Jesuit proved

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<sup>391</sup> P. Bradley's papers at Franciscan archives, Killiney, Co. Dublin, P Bradley to B. Jackman

12 Feb. 1915 .

<sup>392</sup> H Gill papers, JAD box 25, , diary p.40.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., p.103.

insuperable'.<sup>395</sup> 'He had been recommended for one by his Commanding Officer, by his Brigadier and by myself,' wrote General Hickie to Fr. Doyle's Father, 'Superior Authority however, has not granted it'.<sup>396</sup> In another case, this time of Fr. Knapp who died from wounds in 1917, James W. Taylor has suggested that like, Fr. Doyle, Knapp deserved the 'Highest award for gallantry'.<sup>397</sup> Johnstone and Hagerty, referring to both Doyle's and Knapp's failure to be awarded the V.C., remarked that:

It is interesting nonetheless, taking account of relative military achievement and losses of each division, to compare Victoria Crosses awarded to the 16<sup>th</sup> Irish Division, and 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division. Having carefully examined the circumstances of each award and the numbers involved, it is difficult not to accept that there was discrimination against the 16<sup>th</sup> division. Fr Doyle may have been a victim.<sup>398</sup>

In addition to all of this, several Irish Catholic chaplains betrayed a remarkable dislike for non-Irish soldiers. Fr. Browne, writing to his provincial in January 1917, complained of the cold in the front line: 'No fires, stoves and cold food. Still it is wonderful how bright and patient the Irishmen are, the English elements of the battalion are quite

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<sup>395</sup> Johnstone and Hagerty, *The Cross on the Sword*, p.163.

<sup>396</sup> L. Cooper, *God on our Side*, p.209.

<sup>397</sup> James W Taylor, *The 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Rifles in the Great War* ( Dublin, 2002) p.341.

<sup>398</sup> Johnstone and Hagerty, *Cross on the Sword*, p.163.



different in the way they face suffering'.<sup>399</sup> Fr. Henry Gill complained that soldiers had used the local village church as a billet, putting straw on the floor also. 'The *Curé* said mass every morning and was ignored by the soldiers (not Irish)'.<sup>400</sup> Fr. Bradley commented that only the Irish Catholics availed themselves of the opportunity to hear Mass and receive absolution from a French *Curé* - 'The pagan dogs take it easy, except the Irish'.<sup>401</sup> Mc Rory believed that English soldiers were not as brave as the Irish and gave several examples of their failures and the rewards that he believed they had not earned. The 'Warwicks', he claimed in his diary in May 1915, failed to help the Irish at Wieltje and the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders 'ran from their trenches'.<sup>402</sup> He was less than impressed with the Indian troops he came across: 'Those Black soldiers are not brave and are more inclined to run than to fight'.<sup>403</sup> On British officers he observed, 'The feeding of ducks would be a more suited occupation for some military men than the leading of brave Irish soldiers'.<sup>404</sup>

While various agencies promoted the idea of a kingdom united against the Germans, in reality there were cracks, as there had always been between the Irish and English in many areas. Even within Catholicism itself, there were deep divisions. The demand for Irish priests for chaplaincy work with Irish regiments has already been noted

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<sup>399</sup> F Brown papers JAD file 9, F. Brown to Rev. Nolan 26 Jan. 1917.

<sup>400</sup> H Gill papers, JAD box 25 Diary, p10.

<sup>401</sup> P. Bradley's papers at Franciscan archives, Killiney, Co. Dublin, P Bradley to B. Jackman  
12 Feb. 1915 .

<sup>402</sup> McRory Papers, PRONI, Diary, Book 1, 18 May 1915.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., p.96. [no date given]

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., p.54.

and also noted is the fact that these demands often originated with Irish chaplains themselves. Fr. Browne constantly wrote to his provincial complaining about English priests in Irish regiments. Fr. Gill argued the same point and Fr. McRory continually complained about the poor performance of English priests in Irish regiments. For Mc Rory, though, it was not simply that English priests did not perform well, it was that the nature of English Catholicism was different to the Irish version. He described English chaplains as 'Cowardly English priests who consider it a duty to be really English these mongrels are unfit to be the chaplains to brave Irish soldiers and these priests (calling themselves English) are all so anxious to be chaplains to Irish regiments'.<sup>405</sup> McRory also identified a crucial difference between the chaplains: 'English Catholics saw the war as an opportunity to increase the prestige of Catholicism in England'.<sup>406</sup> It was in the interest of the Catholic Church in England to show their chaplains as patriotic, brave and loyal in order to prove that English Catholics were as dependable as any Protestants.

For Irish chaplains, however, this was not necessary because they were simply not patriotic in the same way and therefore felt no particular need to show it. Irish Catholic chaplains were patriotic but that patriotism and loyalty was to Ireland rather than to Britain. Fr. Francis Gleeson encouraged the second battalion, the Royal Munster Fusiliers to use their Irish flags and Rowland Feilding commented on the Connaught Rangers' green flag bearing a harp without the crown. Furthermore, Fr. Gill made great efforts to find the

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<sup>405</sup> McRory Papers, PRONI, Book 1, May 1915, p. 51.

<sup>406</sup> M. Snape, 'The Great War', in D H McLeod (ed.) *World Christianities 1914-2000*. (Cambridge 2006.) p4

missing flag captured by the Irish Brigade at Ramillies and kept on display at the Irish Convent at Ypres. Fr. J McRory told a story of a badly wounded and dying Irish soldier who 'raised his red hands feebly and said [oh wir it for Ireland]'.<sup>407</sup> Irish Catholic priests volunteered for chaplaincy duty mainly to ensure that Catholic soldiers received the sacraments, particularly absolution, before a battle and extreme unction on the battlefield or in the casualty clearing stations and other medical posts. There was a belief in Ireland that, at the point of death, a struggle took place between Heaven and Hell for the soul of the dead. It was important that the Catholic chaplain win as many souls for Heaven as was possible and it was a great comfort to Catholic soldiers that the chaplain was at their side in their final trial.

In general it seems that the Catholic Irish soldier was not just religious but, more importantly, knowledgeable about his faith. Furthermore, it is clear that he came from a background where religion was seen as an important element in his life. Several comments in *Catholic Soldiers* refer to Irish soldiers understanding key religious beliefs such as the Immaculate Conception.<sup>408</sup> Chaplains at the front constantly refer to the eagerness of the men to attend Mass and other sacraments, commentators like Feilding, not familiar with Irish regiments, were very surprised at the religiosity of their Irish soldiers and mention this devotion on several occasions.<sup>409</sup> Apart from a great desire to receive the sacraments, Irish Catholic soldiers demonstrated their devotion through the

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<sup>407</sup> McRory papers, PRONI, Diary Book 1, p. 23...(These were the last words supposedly uttered by Patrick Sarsfield the famous Irish Jacobite commander, as he was dying during the battle of Landen 1693.)

<sup>408</sup> Plater, *Catholic Soldiers*, pp.34-36.

<sup>409</sup> Feilding, *War Letters*, pp.75, 84-85.

wearing of religious emblems, carrying of rosary beads and a willingness to attend at retreats, like that organised by Fr. F. Browne in November 1917.<sup>410</sup> Of course it could be argued that the close proximity of violent death in the trenches concentrated the minds of the men on religion and as M. Snape has pointed out, ‘the fervour of the men’s Catholicity was at any moment proportional to the amount of danger that was to be faced’.<sup>411</sup> It was not just the men facing death in the front line trenches that exhibited a serious interest in religion. The letters from relatives of soldiers to religious magazines like ‘The Messenger’ demonstrate a deep religious belief as well as a sound knowledge of their faith. Fr. Gleeson’s letters to the relatives of men killed, and their replies, suggest that this religious fervour was apparent amongst all classes in Irish Catholic society.<sup>412</sup> It is hardly surprising that Catholicism was so deeply ingrained in the Irish Catholic soldier in 1914. The Devotional Revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had created a situation in Ireland where the Catholic Church had become the most important force in Irish Catholic society. It was the focus of popular loyalty in a way that the Protestant state was not. Despite a thorough knowledge of Catholic doctrine and genuine piety, Irish Catholic soldiers were often seen by advanced Nationalists as irreligious and immoral. The high levels of venereal disease, amongst soldiers who had spent time in India, suggested sexual immorality. The existence of one of the largest tolerated red-light districts in Europe, in Dublin, further convinced many of the validity of that view. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which claims of sexual immorality were politically motivated, it is clear that there was a

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<sup>410</sup> Browne papers, JAD file 8.F. Browne to Rev. Nolan, 2 Nov.1917.

<sup>411</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.45.

<sup>412</sup> Gleeson papers, ADA, M. Burke to F. Gleeson, 23, Dec, 1917.

widespread belief that Irish soldiers in the British Army were somehow more immoral than the rest of Irish Catholic society.

Despite the assertion that 'there is no base sectarian spirit in the British Army',<sup>413</sup> the anti-Catholicism apparent among the Protestant officers of some Irish regiments suggests a lack of unity in the face of the common enemy. I have already mentioned the case of Major Lloyd, whose sectarianism caused two letters of complaint to Rawlinson . Lloyd objected to the presence of any Catholic chaplain in the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Rifles, despite its being eighty per cent Catholic. This is probably an isolated case as Fr. Henry Gill served with the second battalion of the Rifles and mentions no such problem there. John Lucy, who also served in the same regiment, made very few references to sectarianism at all, and none relating to officers. It could be argued that the Royal Irish Rifles was an Ulster regiment and that the majority of its recruits came from that area where sectarian attitudes were the norm. However, Lloyd's background was not Ulster, but rather English. He came via the Berkshire Regiment and his mother's family, the Colcoughs of Tintern Abbey in Co. Wexford, although Protestant, had a long history of Catholic and Irish sympathies (one of them was even a United Irish leader in the 1798 rebellion). The Royal Irish Rifles' New Army battalions had strong connections with the UVF but the first battalion was a professional, pre-1914 formation. Discussion of religion in the officers' mess was very uncommon in such regiments and it is likely that alcohol was involved.

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<sup>413</sup> Anon, *Catholics of the British Empire and the War* (London, 1916), p.3.

Lloyd himself was deeply unpopular and J. W. Taylor has claimed that 'I could hardly find a complimentary word [about Lloyd ] in any of my research'.<sup>414</sup>

The 1916 rising in Dublin created further divisions and further distrust of the loyalty of southern Irish regiments. For the Irish soldier, it began a process which ended in the alienation of those who fought in the Great War, an alienation which is only now being dealt with by the Irish State. As noted earlier, this can clearly be seen in the religious magazine *The Irish Messenger* which gradually decreased the numbers of requests for prayers being sent in by the relatives of serving soldiers, until by 1918 it published none at all. Irish priests serving as chaplains in England were, on occasions, verbally attacked by English Catholics because of their 'Irish' patriotism (Fr. E Maguire complained to Rawlinson that he was criticised for being 'pro-German').<sup>415</sup> Another chaplain complained of a more diffuse anti-Irish feeling.<sup>416</sup>

Within the Irish hierarchy, too, there was disunity and a lack of a common purpose about the war. The leading archbishops (Armagh and Dublin) were not in favour of the war and refused to support recruiting or indeed lend any support at all to recruiting. This was particularly true of Dr. Walsh of Dublin who distrusted the Irish Parliamentary Party. The bishop of Limerick, Dr.O' Dwyer, was openly anti-British and very critical of the British

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<sup>414</sup> Taylor, *The 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Rifles*, p.349.

<sup>415</sup> RP, box 4, T E Maguire to B.Rawlinson, 17 July 1917.

<sup>416</sup> RP, box 2, Hagarty to B.Rawlinson, re Fr Phelan, who was reported to Cardinal Bourne for use of bad language. In his defence he claimed he heard someone describe the Irish as 'vermin and scum of the earth'. Letter dated 20 Nov.1916.

response to the 1916 rising. His diocese sent no secular clergy at all to work as chaplains. Other bishops favoured the Irish Parliamentary Party and supported John Redmond's stance on the war by supporting the recruiting campaign although not speaking at recruiting meetings themselves.

Between the Irish and English hierarchies, too, there was division and distrust. Much of this related to the power exercised by Cardinal Bourne over the appointment of chaplains. Irish bishops felt that Cardinal Logue of Armagh should have been responsible for the appointment of Irish chaplains, or at least chaplains to Irish regiments and training camps in Ireland. Cardinal Bourne, on the other hand, regarded all chaplains volunteering in Britain and Ireland as, in effect, British and refused to regard the Irish as a separate group. Cardinal Logue believed that this situation was one cause of the lack of priests in Ireland volunteering for chaplaincy work.<sup>417</sup> Of course, the differing views on the war no doubt also contributed to the disagreements between Westminster and Armagh. Their long-running dispute was referred to Rome on several occasions, eventually resulting in the appointment of Monsignor Keatinge as *Episcopus Castrensis*.

Finally, the ambivalence of the Irish hierarchy was fully reflected in the attitude of the Irish priests. The failure of some bishops to encourage priests to volunteer as chaplains meant there was a shortage of chaplains at the front, especially in the early years of the war. This situation was worsened by a shortage of priests in Ireland (at least, according to Cardinal Logue). In reality, many Irish priests would not volunteer for

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<sup>417</sup>Johnstone and Hagerty, *Cross and the Sword*, p.185.

chaplaincy work because of their political views. The 'witness statements' taken by the Bureau of Military Affairs of the Irish Army contain the statements of many Irish priests who campaigned against recruitment and in favour of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Volunteers and later Sinn Fein. Far from supporting the British war effort, these priests participated in activities which weakened British control in Ireland and some were involved in planning the 1916 rising itself.

In conclusion, the Irish Catholic church did not respond to the challenges of the Great War in the same way as the Catholic Church in England. The Irish church was deeply divided, some prelates supporting Redmond's pro-war stance, others finding it impossible to support Britain in the war and others following the teaching of Pope Benedict who 'blamed the war on the loss of Christian wisdom, and the self-interest of men and nations'.<sup>418</sup> This resulted in fewer Irish chaplains than there would have been if the hierarchy had been more united and supportive of the war. While those priests who did volunteer for chaplaincy work were just as committed and hardworking as other Catholic chaplains (more so, if Fr. McRory is to be believed), many were very proud of their Irish identity and were keen to highlight it to their men. While the majority were not necessarily anti-British, they did come from a rural middle class whose politics were traditionally Irish Nationalist. This in turn may have influenced their views of the Chaplains' Department and its senior personnel, their views which were often less than enthusiastic.

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<sup>418</sup> Aan de Weil, *Catholic Church in Ireland*, p. 9.



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