

PROTESTANTS IN A CATHOLIC STATE – A SILENT MINORITY IN IRELAND

*Stephen Mennell, Mitchell Elliott,
Paul Stokes, Aoife Rickard and
Ellen O'Malley-Dunlop*

The Republic of Ireland is the only English-speaking country in which Roman Catholics constitute a majority of the population. For that majority, Catholicism came to form a most important and emotionally charged part of their sense of national identity, and Catholicism is indeed one of the traits in terms of which the Irish are perceived by the rest of the world. But the island of Ireland was politically partitioned in 1920. The South, which became the Irish Free State and later the Republic of Ireland, gained its independence from Britain, while Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom. The majority of the population of Northern Ireland is Protestant, and for them Protestantism is an equally important part of *their* sense of identity. For about half a century, both parts of the island experienced in some degree and in somewhat different ways what Inglis (page 1 above) calls 'the conflation of religious and political rule', meaning a lack of differentiation between church and state, and the concession of power to an institution which is not democratically elected or subject to the force of reason. Lord Brookeborough, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland 1943–63, famously referred to the creation in the North of 'a Protestant state for a Protestant people', and the corresponding notion of a Catholic state for Catholic people permeated the thinking of many in the South. The cunnity between North and South carried with it disadvantages – severe in the North, less so in the South – for the religious minorities in each jurisdiction. In the North, the decimation practised against the Catholic minority eventually led to the violent 'troubles', which have afflicted the North for the last three decades, and which may now at last be coming to a close. The conflict

has been between two communities which have used 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' as badges of collective identity. In the South, on the other hand, a tiny Protestant minority has lived in peace – but not entirely without its passing troubles – for many decades. This chapter reports a study of this less reported legacy of Ireland's complicated history, the Protestant minority in a Catholic state.¹

The story may have wider significance when considered in comparison with the experience of Poland, another overwhelmingly Catholic country. The Catholic Church, from the 1920s to the 1970s or 1980s achieved what Inglis (1998) has called a 'moral monopoly' in the Republic of Ireland, and yet the Republic never ceased politically to be a relatively pluralist parliamentary democracy. As its monopoly has declined in recent years, the Irish Catholic Church has had to learn to behave more like just one player – albeit still a strong one – in a situation of both political and moral pluralism. The Polish experience was rather different: the Polish Catholic Church appeared in the guise of champion of democracy when, as the most powerful alternative focus of power, it became the vehicle of resistance against an autocratic Communist state. The emergence of political democracy and civil society in Poland since 1990 has, however, exposed the Church as itself a relatively autocratic force. Like the Irish Church, the Polish Church has experienced difficulty in the process of adjustment to a pluralist society.

THE EMOTIONAL LEGACY OF RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

Anyone who studies Northern Ireland must be struck by the intensity of feeling which the conflict evokes. It seems to go beyond what is required by a rational defence of the divergent interests which undoubtedly exist. *There is an emotional element here, a welling-up of deep unconscious forces.* It is worth examining what contribution psychology can make to an explanation of the conflict. (Whyte 1990; our emphasis)

As a matter of common sense, this deep emotional element to which Whyte referred is widely recognised. It is present on the part both of Catholics and Protestants, and in both Northern Ireland (the 'North' or 'the Six Counties') and the Republic of Ireland (the 'South', or 'the Twenty-Six Counties'), even though in the Republic feelings are far more muted.

Yet, despite Whyte's plea, research into communal conflicts in Ireland has so far thrown little light on the workings of their emotional component. The contribution of many contemporary social *psychological* studies (e.g. Cairns, 1994; Brew, 1994) is limited by their methodological individualism and their use of overly cognitive models – they principally

focus on individuals, not groups, and on how individuals *perceive* rather than *feel*. On the other hand, *sociological* studies – such as the notable book by Ruane and Todd (1996) – although concerned with groups rather than individuals, tend to focus on what Whyte called ‘the rational defence of divergent interests’. In both cases, these foci render them largely unsuitable for investigating the ‘deep unconscious forces’ to which Whyte was referring. Our approach is to combine psychology and sociology, recognising not only the importance of emotion as well as perceptions in group conflicts, but also the ways in which emotions are linked to group identities, generated and transmitted from generation to generation within groups. The emotional component of group conflicts has to be studied not as a psychological property of individual persons, but as a property of the social bonds which link people together and also help to draw boundaries between them and other groups.

In both jurisdictions, although much more prominently in the North, Protestants exhibit signs of a ‘siege mentality’. In both cases, but more recently in the North, Protestants have in the past constituted a political, economic and social ‘establishment’, yet they have become – or fear they will become – ‘outsiders’. (The full implications of these terms are explained on p. 90.) As Norbert Elias (1996: 19) in particular has stressed, there are strong connections between a community’s long-term fortunes and experience in the past and its social habitus or ‘social personality structure’ at the present. In this ‘we-stratum’ there are often powerful emotions and complex symptoms of disturbance at work. In spite of the fact that violent confrontations between Protestants and Catholics are a thing of the increasingly distant past in the South, emotional residues of the past are still present.

CHURCH AND STATE IN IRELAND: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Protestant community in Ireland dates from shortly after the first emergence of Protestantism in the Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe, and is entangled with the ties which have bound together the history of the two islands of Ireland and Britain since the Middle Ages. Norman warriors from England had become involved in the conflicts between Irish regional magnates in the twelfth century, and the English kings had laid claim to Ireland since that time. Their claims had little practical effect beyond the limits of the Pale, a geographical area around Dublin. The ‘Old English’ nobility and other English settlers in Ireland had, so to speak, ‘gone native’, and many of them had adopted the Irish (Gaelic) language and culture. Although English kings repeatedly strove

to establish their rule in the face of many rebellions, until the Reformation religious differences played little part. After the Reformation, the struggle to establish an effective English suzerainty took on a religious colour. In the latter half of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century, Protestantism came to be identified with loyalty to the crown, Catholicism with resistance to it. Under Queen Elizabeth I of England (1558–1603) and her successor King James (1603–25), ‘plantations’ were adopted as the strategy for the final assertion of English rule in Ireland. That involved the seizure of land from the previous Gaelic or ‘Old English’ Catholic landholders, and their replacement by English and Scottish Protestants, a seizure backed by the military power of the English state and at least partly justified at the time in religious terms. Early plantations took place in the province of Munster, the southernmost of the four provinces of the island, and in the Irish Midlands (the location of our fourth, rural focus group). The most thorough plantation, and the one with the most enduring historical consequences, however, was the plantation of Ulster (the northernmost province). This took place after ‘the Flight of the Earls’ in 1607, when Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, and his allies and retinue fled to Spain. Their lands and those of their Catholic and Irish-speaking vassals were seized, and the settlers who took their place included a large proportion of Scottish Presbyterians. Presbyterians are still the most numerous Protestant denomination in Northern Ireland, and Protestants in general still outnumber Catholics there. Further south, Anglicanism was the more common form of Protestantism, and Catholics always remained a large majority. (Although its members were a small minority of the population, the Church of Ireland was the established church in Ireland – supported by tithes much resented by Catholics – until 1869).

Because Irish historiography is traditionally most concerned with the manifold injustices of *Irish* history, there is a tendency to overlook two facts: that the Wars of Religion in the rest of Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were just as much battles for land as they were in Ireland; and that, bad as it was in Ireland, there was nothing very special about the brutality by which land was conquered and the dispossessed treated. Much the same has happened in all large-scale agrarian societies (Goudsblom, 1996: 49–62). To recognise that Ireland is not nearly so exceptional as is often thought does not, however, help to reduce the deep-rooted resentment that is still felt.

In Britain and Ireland, the counterparts of the Thirty Years War were the civil wars of the 1640s and the subsequent invasion of Ireland by Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s. In comparison with the consequences of that terrible war in Germany, these islands escaped lightly, but Cromwell is remembered for his massacre of the inhabitants of Drogheda and other

acts of ruthlessness. The outcome of the civil wars was very different in the two islands. In Britain, they eventuated – fortuitously – in two relatively evenly balanced factions within the landowning class, differing somewhat in religious beliefs and attitudes towards the powers of the monarchy. These factions formed the basis for the development of parliamentary parties and political democracy (Elias, in Elias and Dunning, 1986: 26–40). In Ireland, the outcome was a very uneven power ratio. The civil wars led to the formation of the Protestant Ascendancy as a ruling class whose dominance was maintained by the Penal Laws and ultimately, again, by the military power of what was now the British state.² The Penal Laws were a framework of discrimination – rigorous in principle although somewhat hit-and-miss in application – against Catholics, disqualifying them from holding public office and, more importantly, raising severe legal obstacles to the inheritance of land from generation to generation of Catholic landowners. After the great rebellion of 1798, the Act of Union of 1800 abolished the Irish parliament in Dublin and thereafter the Westminster parliament legislated for Ireland as for England, Wales and Scotland. The nineteenth century was marked by agitation for Home Rule and – in the context of a large proportion of the land being owned by a minority of Protestant landlords – for land reform. Home Rule was very nearly restored on several occasions. It was resisted strongly by the Ulster Protestants and their allies in the House of Lords, and the measure was overtaken by the outbreak of the First World War. There followed the Easter Rising of 1916 and, in the wake of the execution of its leaders, the triumph of Sinn Féin – the separatist party – in the 1918 General Election in all parts of Ireland except the North. The Sinn Féin Members of Parliament refused to take their seats at Westminster, and sat instead in the first Dáil Éireann in Dublin as the Westminster government control gradually slipped from the hands of the British government (Garvin, 1996). In 1920, the Westminster Parliament passed the Government of Ireland Act, which foreshadowed the partition of the island into the Six and the Twenty-Six Counties, which in turn came into effect at the end of the War of Independence. That war was concluded by a Treaty, which itself became the occasion of an even bloodier Civil War between pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty factions within the new Irish Free State.

It is scarcely surprising that two centuries of Protestant triumphalism were succeeded by several decades of Catholic triumphalism in the South after independence, nor for that matter that partition was succeeded by a reversion of a parallel Protestant triumphalism under the Stormont regime in the North. In the North, five decades of systematic discrimination against Catholics – in matters of employment, housing, politics, and

policing – resulted in the emergence of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s, and subsequently to the low-intensity civil war involving paramilitary violence by both Catholics and Protestants (rooted mainly in working-class communities on both sides). In the South, the original Irish Free State constitution was formally secular, and Éamon de Valera's 1937 constitution, which succeeded it and remains in force (with amendments) today, is at least relatively non-denominational. Article 44 of the 1937 constitution asserted the State's recognition of the Protestant and Jewish congregations in the Republic, but also 'the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens'. Article 44 was amended by referendum in 1972 to remove this phrase. The 1937 constitution also contains other religious references. Article 6 asserts that 'All powers of government . . . derive under God from the people', a phrase of apparently innocuous piety but which, the American Protestant critic Paul Blanshard pointed out, could be interpreted as embodying the political philosophy of Pope Leo XIII and as obliquely acknowledging 'the Church's supremacy over any area of democracy which the Church cared to claim as its own' (Blanshard, 1954: 71). Yet, unlike in the United Kingdom, where the Church of England and the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland are each established churches in their respective countries, there is legally no established church in Ireland. Blanshard asserted that Ireland was a 'clerical state' because of the Church's ability to influence public policy through what a few years later Robert Dahl (1961) was to call 'covert power', that is, a pervasive tendency for people to trim actions and policies to what they perceived and anticipated the Church would wish. But even Blanshard admitted that 'Its political democracy is genuine, and it grants complete official freedom to opposition political parties and opposition religious groups' (Blanshard, 1954: 67).

Between formal legality and social reality, however, there was a yawning gap. After independence, a very strong Catholic ethos took hold in public life (Whyte, 1970, 1980). Besides the already widespread feeling for the majority that to be Irish was to be Catholic and that to be British was to be Protestant, arguably the promotion of a strong Catholicism helped heal the divisions left by the Civil War within the majority community. The Catholic Church then, as now, controlled the majority of schools, hospitals and welfare services. Catholic social teaching was embodied in social legislation (Whyte, 1980: 24–61). Divorce, for example, was forbidden under the constitution until a referendum in 1996; the sale of contraceptives was illegal until recent years; and abortion is still proscribed under the constitution. These are some of the facts which justify Hughes' (1998) in speaking of a 'moral monopoly'.

Catholic dominance found expression in a number of ways which in hindsight are probably embarrassing to the majority of Irish people today. There was extensive censorship of what now seem quite inoffensive publications. Blanshard (1954: 95-102) gives a long list of officially banned books in force in the early 1950s; such is the distinction of the banned authors that, again in hindsight, one might consider it a humiliation for an author *not* to appear in the list. A small number of ugly incidents are also still remembered two or three generations onwards. The three best remembered are perhaps the controversies over the appointment of a librarian in County Mayo in 1931, the 'Mother and Child' affair of 1951, and the Fethard boycott of 1957.

1 Appointment of a librarian in County Mayo, 1931

In Ireland between the wars, relatively few people bought books, and public lending libraries played a correspondingly larger part in determining the material to which readers had access. In 1931, Miss Letitia Dunbar-Harrison, a Protestant graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, was nominated by the Local Appointments Commission of the national government to the post of County Librarian in Mayo, a county in the west of Ireland where the population was perhaps 98 per cent Catholic. The Commission had been established to take most local appointments out of the hands of local government, in an effort to root out jobbery and clericalism and to ensure that posts were filled entirely on professional merit. By law, the County Council was required to accept the recommendation of the Commission. But the Library Committee of the County Council, dominated by Catholic priests, refused to do so. When the full County Council refused to overturn the decision of its committee, the whole Council was suspended by the national government, and Miss Dunbar-Harrison installed in office. But this provoked a highly effective boycott of library services in the county, and most of the branch libraries closed down. Most of the Catholic bishops argued that it was wrong for a Protestant to have such potential influence over what the Catholic majority read. It became expedient for the national government to transfer Miss Dunbar-Harrison to a comparably senior post elsewhere, and the following year the incoming Fianna Fáil government under Éamon de Valera restored the County Council (Whyte, 1980: 44-7; Blanshard, 1954: 110-12).

2 The Mother and Child affair, 1951

Of much greater long-term significance was the defeat of the Mother and Child Scheme by the Catholic hierarchy in 1951 (Whyte, 1980: 196-272; Blanshard, 1954: 73-83). The Minister of Health in the inter-party government of the day was a young (Catholic) doctor, Noel Browne. Aware that infant mortality had remained relatively high in Ireland, while in other European countries (notably in neighbouring Britain, where the National Health Service had just been established) it had fallen considerably in the course of the twentieth century, Dr Browne proposed legislation to bring in a measure of free medical care and maternal education. This was opposed by the Catholic hierarchy, from a mixture of motives. The bishops were suspicious of any public provision which might impinge on its control, direct or indirect, of most of the hospitals in the Republic. But, more specifically, they were concerned that no woman should learn about contraception in the course of any programme of maternity training, and that gynaecological care should in no circumstances involve therapeutic abortion – even though Browne's scheme did not provide for either of these eventualities. On receipt of a letter from the hierarchy, the Cabinet dropped the proposal entirely, and Dr Browne was forced to resign. The then Taoiseach, John A. Costello, stated that 'I, as a Catholic, obey my Church authorities and will continue to do so'. Although a watered-down version of the scheme was subsequently enacted by the next Fianna Fáil government, and although today Ireland has very high standards of perinatal care, this episode – by revealing very publicly that the Catholic hierarchy in those days had the power to overrule the elected government – caused grave disquiet in many quarters, and may indeed in hindsight be seen to mark the early beginnings of the decay of the Church's moral monopoly.

3 The Fethard boycott, 1957

Something as private as the breakdown of a marriage in Fethard-on-Sea in County Wexford was the occasion of national controversy in 1957 (Whyte, 1980: 322-5). A Catholic farmer had married a Protestant woman in 1949, and the bride had – as required by the Catholic Church – given an undertaking that the children of the marriage be brought up as Catholics. Early in 1957, she apparently changed her mind, and fled with her children to Belfast, from where she stipulated that she would agree to a reunion only if her husband would agree to the children being brought up as Protestants. In Fethard, it was rumoured that local Protestants had assisted the wife in her flight, and in retaliation local Catholics began a

boycott of their Protestant neighbours. Two Protestant shopkeepers lost much of their trade, a music teacher most of her pupils, and a Catholic teacher resigned from the local Protestant school. The boycott was not condemned by the Catholic hierarchy, and one of the bishops preached 'a concerted campaign to entice or kidnap Catholic children and deprive them of their faith'. On the other hand, many other Catholic voices – including that of the Taoiseach, Éamon de Valera – were raised in protest against the boycott, but it lingered until the autumn of 1957.

Times, of course, have changed a great deal since these three still-remembered incidents, and priests are no longer able to act as what Blanshard (1954: 155) called 'moral policemen'; Inglis (1998) has traced the decline of the moral monopoly of the Catholic Church, especially through the impact of television and other mass media since the 1960s, and as a result of numerous clerical sex scandals in the 1990s. But the three incidents just described were, in any case, symptoms of a period of Catholic triumphalism which followed a much longer period when the Protestants enjoyed a standing in Irish society out of proportion to their numbers.

To this day, in the Republic, both the minority Protestant community and the majority Catholic community are very conscious of the Protestants' former status as a powerful established group.³ It is not hard to uncover an historic emotional burden of guilt on the Protestant side and resentment on the Catholic. But in the meantime the Protestants have become something of an outsider group. The process of transition from established to outsider group is only partly a matter of declining numbers, but numbers are important. Ó Gráda and Walsh (1995: 261) present data on the changing distribution of religious affiliation in the Twenty Six Counties between the last full census before independence and the most recent census in 1991 (Table 1).

The steepest decline in the numbers of Protestants in the twenty-six counties occurred in the 1920s. Much of it was accounted for by the exit of the British garrison, and by the emigration to Great Britain or Northern Ireland of many who could not reconcile themselves to life in the newly independent and Catholic-dominated Irish Free State. Emigration, probably disproportionately higher among young Protestants, continued during the decades of economic and social stagnation following independence. The need to emigrate has historically been resented by people of both religions, but among Protestants the principal focus of resentment had by the 1930s, or 1940s, shifted to the operation of the *Ne Temere* decree (Gates, 1967). Because of its overwhelming strength in the twenty-six counties, the Catholic Church was able to enforce – perhaps

Table 1. Distribution of the population of the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland by religion

	Proportion of total population						Percentage change in numbers 1911–91
	1911	1926	1961	1981	1991		
Roman Catholic	89.6	92.6	94.9	93.1	91.6	+ 14.8	
Church of Ireland	7.9	5.5	3.7	2.8	2.5	– 64.7	
Presbyterian	1.4	1.1	0.7	0.4	0.4	– 69.0	
Other stated denominations	—	—	—	0.5	1.3	—	
No religion	1.0	0.8	0.7	1.1	1.9	+ 500.1	
Not stated	—	—	—	2.1	2.4	—	
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	+ 12.3	

Source: Cormac Ó Gráda and Brendan Walsh, 'Fertility and population in Ireland, North and South', *Population Studies*, 49, 1995: 259–79.

more effectively in the Republic than in any other country – the principle that the partners to a 'mixed' Catholic/Protestant marriage had to agree before the wedding that the offspring of their union would be raised as Catholics. This principle contributed to the further numerical decline of the Protestant minority, although it is difficult to compute its exact contribution. Falling numbers pose a direct obstacle to the survival of the Protestant community, because not only is endogamy difficult to sustain among such a small minority ('There are not many Protestant guys out there', as one of our young female participants remarked wistfully), but so also is the social infrastructure or networks of predominantly Protestant organisations which once existed – such as the Boys' Brigade, troops of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, tennis clubs and so on, as well as parish congregations themselves – especially in rural areas where adherents are more sparsely scattered. Still more important for survival in country areas is ownership of land. Anxieties about the attrition of 'Protestant land' were openly expressed by members of our focus groups. In the rural area which we investigated, it was said that a large number of Protestant farmers had never married, so there were no Protestant children to whom the land could be left.

Yet it is not *just* numbers which turn an established group into an outsider group. Protestants, probably never amounted to more than about

nine per cent of the population in the twenty-six counties (Church of Ireland membership totalled 8.5 per cent in 1861). It is also – and more especially – a shift in the power ratio between groups which is the hallmark of such a transition from established to outsider status. The decline of Protestant organisational infrastructure would contribute to this shift in power, but the Protestant community did not become powerless. Despite the operations of the Land Commission following independence, Protestants are probably still somewhat over-represented among the larger landholders. And, at least until fairly recently, there were many businesses known to be owned by Protestants and employing mainly Protestants. If their economic power persisted, however, there was a decline in the social prestige and the political power and influence the wealthier Protestants had enjoyed prior to independence. They ceased to be part of the power elite of the state. Of some relevance here is Albert Hirschman's discussion of *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (1970), as three strategies available to people who feel dissatisfied with the rewards they gain from their organisational commitments. 'Exit' was the choice of many Protestants in the years following Irish independence, and many of those who remained felt a loyalty somewhat divided between two states: the predominantly Catholic Free State and the predominantly Protestant United Kingdom. The least probable strategic choice would appear to have been 'voice'. For many years, even before independence, many Irish Protestants had felt a 'precarious belonging' (Dunlop, 1995), sensing themselves as guests among 'an unappeasable host' (see Tracy, 1998). In consequence, those who did not exit have not been very vocal in the public domain. After some early resistance by prominent Protestants – such as the poet William Butler Yeats who, having become a Senator in the Irish Free State, protested that if divorce were to be made illegal, then all civil marriage might as well be abolished too (Blanshard, 1954: 168) – they have tended to become a silent minority. The have kept their heads down, and not rocked the boat. Victor Griffin (1993: 25), former Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, recalls how in the 1930s and 1940s his mother urged him not to make waves, 'or you'll get us all burnt out'. House burnings were already an unrealistic fear, but a danger then of very recent memory. It is significant that the most outspoken book on church-state relations in Ireland in the 1950s, that by Paul Blanshard, was written by an American, not an Irish, Protestant. More recently, some southern Protestants (like Victor Griffin himself, and others recently in the Church of Ireland Synod, as well as some of the younger people in our groups) have said that the time has come for more outspokenness. But the old fears still echo, especially among our older respondents.

HIDDEN DEPTHS: TALKING TO SOUTHERN PROTESTANTS TODAY

During the summer and autumn of 1996 we conducted 'gatekeeper interviews' with a number of prominent Protestants, both clergy and lay people. These conversations were designed to elicit a preliminary impression of the main sources of worry and concern – and, for that matter, of satisfaction – among Protestants in the Republic. These formed the basis for drawing up the 'topic guide' used by the team in facilitating the 'resonant focus groups' which were the most important and innovative aspect of the research project.

These groups in fact represent a novel hybrid of the conventional focus group (as currently widely used in sociology and in political and market research – see Merton *et al.*, 1990 [1956]; Morgan, 1988, 1993) and the standard analytic group developed over the last four decades by analysts within the Group Analytic Society (Foulkes and Anthony, 1984). On the one hand, the groups used in our research differed considerably from conventional focus groups. Sociologists or market researchers usually have a fairly rigid interview schedule to work through. As facilitators we were much more restrained in directing the discussions. On the other hand, these groups also differed from a standard analytic group in a number of ways, most notably in that many of the participants knew each other prior to and outside the group meetings, whereas it is a strict principle of therapeutic groups that members must not contact each other outside group meetings.

It was a requirement of participation in any of the groups that members should have been brought up principally in the Republic of Ireland (rather than, for example, in Great Britain or Northern Ireland, where early experience would be coloured by the fact that Protestants there are not in the minority). In total, twelve group meetings were held. Initially, we organised two meetings of each of two pilot groups, both comprising about a dozen young people, mainly students. On the basis of our experience with the pilot groups, we then recruited two much larger 'definitive groups'.

The first of these comprised 25–30 Protestant churchgoers in a suburban area of south Dublin, recruited with the help of Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist clergy in the area, with whom a further series of 'gatekeeper' interviews had been held before the meetings convened. The participants were mainly middle-aged people, with a sprinkling of younger members. The second definitive group comprised about 25 Protestant churchgoers – almost all Anglicans – in five parishes in the Midlands, historically an area of Protestant plantation, recruited with the help of local rectors. Further gatekeeper interviews, including both Protestant

and Catholics) were conducted, to elicit something of the history and reciprocal perceptions of the religious communities in the area. Both 'definitive' groups met four times, in church halls in the respective areas.

PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY AND SOLIDARITY

How important is the sense of Protestant identity today? The participants in our study – with the exception of the first pilot group – were recruited through the good offices of Protestant clergy from among regular churchgoers, and so there may have been some bias towards people for whom their religious group affiliation was particularly important. We tried to probe this by asking to what extent they were conscious of belonging to a wider network that included people of Protestant background who were no longer active churchgoers. The impression was that there was indeed such a wider network. One participant observed that, 'Yes, of course, we all know each other', and others agreed that wherever they went in Ireland, they would know 'friends of friends'.

Yet this sense of belonging to a wider network is two-edged: in part it reflects the very smallness of the numbers of people involved. One of the major themes to come out of our discussions was the sense of isolation felt among the Protestant community. This was perhaps particularly marked in rural areas, and among our student pilot group (several of whom came from rural areas and the border counties). There were many hints at the sense of uninvolvement in the local community produced by Protestant children going away to boarding schools. This sometimes led, at least in the past, to consequential exclusions – for example, those who had played rugby were disqualified from playing Gaelic football or hurling within the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). The processes of exclusion could be two way: a student from one of the border counties, whose parents had sent her to the local Catholic school because of its musical facilities, related how in consequence their fellow-Protestant parishioners had boycotted the family. The Protestants seem to some extent to have lived in a 'bubble' within the wider society. Despite the sense of belonging to a Protestant network, their discourse seemed to centre on family members, with other friends being mentioned relatively rarely.

The central problem of identity among the very small Protestant minority in the Republic is an ambivalence between wanting to be different and wanting to be the same. Two themes intertwined in the discussions: on the one hand, a *yearning for inclusion* in the business and public life of the Republic; and, on the other hand, a preoccupation with a *background of problems* for the minority in dealing with a vast Catholic majority.

Theme A: 'We are included, things are better now'

Under this theme the following points emerged:

- (i) The Protestant/Catholic divide is less important now. Participants repeatedly emphasised how well they got on with their Catholic neighbours. Typical stories included:
 - a man who recounted the mutual admiration between his family and their 'God-fearing Catholic neighbours', how he had grown up with a hurley [an implement used in the Gaelic game of hurling, a little broader than a hockey stick] and many Catholic friends just 'mucking in' (murmurs of assent from the rest of the group)
 - Catholic neighbours rallying round to help out on the farm in times of illness.
 - The generous response of neighbouring Catholics in contributing to the fund for the re-roofing of the Protestant Parish Church.

- (ii) The state's respect for the Protestant minority. Grateful reference was made to Éamon de Valera's two appeals in Dáil Éireann for the Protestant community to be treated with fairness and respect (although this implies that, at the time, there was a need for such appeals to be voiced). Also mentioned were the freedom for 'Gospel preachers' to address passers-by on street corners, and the introduction (in the 1930s) of free bus passes for Protestant schoolchildren.

- (iii) Equality before the law. It was remarked that Protestants enjoyed equality before the law, and were now 'in the mainstream' of life in the Republic. One participant pointed out that, although there may have been anomalies in Ireland, there was nothing here so baldly discriminatory as the inclusion of Anglican but not Catholic bishops in the British House of Lords.⁴ It was frequently mentioned that there had been two Anglican Presidents of the Republic ('more than our fair share?'), and numerous High Court and Supreme Court judges. Particular and repeated pride was expressed in Jack Boothman's becoming the first Protestant chairman of the GAA.

- (iv) Protestant privileges. There was a marked consciousness of continuing privilege for Protestants, especially in relation to their schools, which were often smaller and had better educational standards than Catholic ones. Some mention was also

made of channels through which jobs were offered to Protestants through organisations such as the Boys' Brigade, though this appeared to be a thing of the past.

Theme B: 'But there are, and have been, problems'

Under this theme the following contrapuntal points emerged:

(i) Past violence

It was not difficult to elicit family lore about incidents of violence dating as far back as the years 1916–23. These included:

- a student whose family remembered their home being caught between the lines in 1916, and a visitor to the house being killed by a stray bullet.
- one participant's great-grandfather, an Inspector in the Royal Irish Constabulary, who was beaten to death with hurleys.
- in a rural area, a mother and father had been taken hostage by the IRA, and then forced to watch the execution of their sons aged about 12 and 14 when they returned from school.
- in the rural areas, there were memories of large landowners being burned out of their homes. This occasionally happened to Catholics too, since the struggles were at least partly fuelled by a thirst for land redistribution (Garvin, 1996).

On the other hand, the activities of the Black and Tans were also remembered. These were mercenaries on the British side of the War of Independence who, among other things, burnt out of their homes Catholic families suspected of IRA sympathies. One participant's uncle, albeit a Protestant, had been taken out by the Tans to be shot, and was saved only by the chance intervention of a senior officer. In another incident, a Protestant church was being shot at by the Tans, and the churchwarden, going for help from the regular British Army, was killed on the return journey when the convoy was ambushed by the IRA.

The fact that these incidents are remembered and passed down over three-quarters of a century gives some indication of how long it will take for bitter memories in the North – if the Good Friday agreement of 1998 leads finally to a peaceful settlement there – to dim.

(ii) Problems deriving from Catholic Church policies

Stories relating to this included:

- Cases of Protestant services – a wedding and a funeral – at which Catholic friends felt obliged, by their own church rules, to stand in the

porch. In a third case, the Catholics 'came in, then went to Confession later!'

- Two cases of interventions by the Legion of Mary: in one, Legion members surrounded a street gospel preacher, separating him from his audience; in another, Catholic girls were sent to greet Protestant boys coming out of a Boys' Brigade meeting.

But most acutely felt and obsessively returned to were the effects of the *Ne Temere* policy. Every group discussed this, often with some bitterness. Stories were told of the ruthlessness of priests in enforcing the rule. The fear of losing their children and grandchildren to the Catholic Church as a result of a 'mixed' marriage often led parents to encourage their children to be distant from Catholic children, especially during adolescence. In rural areas, Protestant 'hops' played a major part in attempting to segregate youngsters – with limited success, it would appear.

(iii) Protestant isolation

- One participant spoke of Protestants being ghettoised, even if the ghetto had its privileges. In this situation, 'Catholic bishops were rude about Protestant beliefs, and Protestant businessmen were rude about Catholic beliefs'.
- One participant mentioned not even knowing, as a child, about an aunt who had married a Catholic.
- Two participants, sisters, recalled as children having been excluded because of their Protestantism – from a play area in South Dublin run by nuns.
- The Fethard boycott of 1957 was remembered.
- There were stories from childhood of being kept indoors on the occasion of *Corpus Christi* processions.
- Some members of pilot groups, mainly composed of students, admitted that they did not admit their Protestant identity to new friends until it was necessary and/or safe to do so.

(iv) Misunderstandings and low-level harassment

These ranged from the trivial to the serious. There were complaints about Catholic ignorance of the Protestant religion, even though, given the numerical imbalance, it is hardly surprising that Protestants know more about Catholicism than Catholics do about Protestantism. Catholics can easily grow up without knowing any Protestants, although the reverse is impossible. Instances of misunderstandings, and low level harassment included:

- 'You don't believe in Mary' (There is a kernel of truth in that 'misunderstanding', since the figure of the Virgin Mary plays a far smaller part in Protestant beliefs and rituals.)
- (Conversely, a Catholic teacher telling a Protestant child to say the Hail Mary, because 'You [Protestants] say it too.' 'No, we don't', protested the child.)
- Anti-Protestant slogans chalked on the blackboard, and some name-calling, confined to children. (What children say may reflect what their parents think but do not openly express.)
- Isolated reports of leg-pulling, and occasionally something a little worse, in the workplace.

Perhaps most serious was the recurrent feeling that one's fellow-citizens of the Republic did not consider one to be entirely Irish if one were not Catholic. In all groups this appeared to be the cause of the most grievous hurt. The attitude was manifested again in some small factual misunderstandings — for instance, it seems to be widely believed that 'The Queen is the head of the Church of Ireland'.⁵ (Recently there has been some embarrassment among southern Anglicans about the continuing inclusion of *God Save the Queen* in the Church of Ireland Hymn Book.) There was also an awareness of the perception that Protestants may tend to show a lack of interest in Irish traditional culture — that, for example, Irish traditional music appears to be associated with Gaelic Catholicism, and Protestants perhaps come late if at all to it.⁶ Underneath these surface manifestations, however, is a far from negligible problem: the Protestant minority is still widely perceived as having a lingering sentimental attachment to Britain and things British. Now, on the one hand, it can be said that our respondents were descended from those Protestants who, in the 1920s, had chosen *not* to go to the United Kingdom, and they loudly protested their loyalty to, and pride in being citizens of, the Republic. There was even mention of Protestant relatives who had taken the nationalist side in the War of Independence. On the other hand, there was a more frequent admission that for a generation or more after independence, family members had listened to British radio, read British newspapers, had pictures in their homes of the Royal Family, avidly listened to the Kings' or the Queen's Christmas broadcasts, and served in the British forces.⁷ (Thousands of Catholics, too, did the latter.) Many would still have relatives in Britain or in the North. The days have long since passed when it was still possible to speak of a recognisable 'ex-minority' body of opinion in the Republic (McDowell, 1997: 163-96), but for the moment a lingering association of Protestantism with Britishness, in the perception at least of some of their fellow citizens, or perhaps in some

Protestants' perception of *the perception* of their fellow citizens — remains a problem.

Lest this appear a mere one-sided litany of Protestant complaint, it should be added that the participants in our study quite often understood why they should be misunderstood and even disliked by the Catholic majority. One participant remarked, and others from time to time hinted, that the severity and enmity of the Catholic church of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and 1950s was 'understandable', given the scorn with which Catholicism had been treated in Ireland by Protestants in previous centuries, mentioning in particular the sustained attempts to convert (or coerce) Catholics to Protestantism.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Not surprisingly, among the southern Protestants we talked to, there seemed to be considerable feelings of anxiety about the North. The militancy of northern Protestants, as portrayed daily on television and in the press, posed a threat to the southerners' wish to believe that 'we are included, things are better now'. The distrust between northerners and southerners appears to be reciprocal. The perception by northerners that their southern co-religionists are a silent minority, tainted by decades of accommodation and the pursuit of a quiet life, has its counterpart in southerners' view of the northerners as intolerant and bigoted. (It should be noted that there is a very similar pattern of reciprocal perception between Northern and Southern Catholics.) Southerners generally disapproved of Northern Protestants' ritual marching in an offensive way, and of their shunning of all things Catholic. The outbreak of the troubles in 1969-70 brought these feelings very near the surface. In our gatekeeper interviews with clergy, we were told that southern Presbyterians would be much happier being affiliated to the Church of Scotland than forming a single province with Northern Presbyterians, and that the Church of Ireland had at one time come close to splitting into two separate provinces.

The troubles had impinged in minor ways on the everyday life of Protestants in the South. We heard, for example, of the following incidents in the early years of the troubles:

- Protestant businesses, both in the Midlands and in the border counties, being daubed with slogans. In the latter case, the slogan had been 'Brits out', although the family in question had been Irish for generations.
- Northern Protestant relatives invited to a funeral in Dublin had audibly made intolerant remarks about Catholicism. When the next funeral in the family came round, the northern relatives had not been

invited – had been told to stay away – and the links with the northern branch of the family had been severed.

- More humorously, the only Protestant in a local FCA (army reserve) unit had been jokingly ‘reassured’ by a colleague: ‘Don’t worry – if the troubles come down here, you lot will all be packed off to Dingle [a town in the remote south-west]’.

While the view was sometimes expressed that ‘we’d all be better off in a united Ireland’, and while accounts were given of how decent and honest individual Northern Irelanders typically were, for instance in business dealings, the balance of feeling appeared to be against closer contact with the ‘crazy people’ up there. One participant chillingly remarked that, while the Protestant minority of three per cent or so was treated tolerantly, ‘things would be a lot less peaceful for us if we constituted twenty per cent’ (Protestants would make up about one fifth of the total population of a united thirty-two county Ireland).

THE STORIES

The discussions in our focus groups told us a great deal about the conscious wishes and fears of our respondents, but in an attempt to trace them at a more unconscious level, we experimented with a novel ‘storytelling’ technique. Right at the beginning of a session, usually in the first session of each group before discussion in the group could have ‘put ideas into their heads’, participants were invited to construct a story, group members chipping in a sentence at a time to make up a group product, ‘in which anything can happen – fish can fly’. At the next meeting of the group, the story was read back, and members were asked to tell us what they associated with the story. Subsequently, we also interpreted the stories according to standard Freudian techniques. When we chose to use this method, we were not at all sure that it would work. Would the participants respond, or would they be too embarrassed? Nor, even if they did indeed respond, were we certain what – if anything – the resulting stories would reveal. In the event, the results were fascinating, indeed stunning, and seem to point to something like a collective unconscious among the Protestant minority outsider group.

Before quoting two of these stories and discussing their possible significance, perhaps a few theoretical observations on phantasy are in order. In early classical Freudian thought, the notions of ‘drive’ and ‘control’ (roughly corresponding to Id and Ego) were paramount. Freud thought of drives and controls as being quantitatively balanced: where drives were ‘stronger’ than controls, they would prevail and ‘steer our

actions; if the constraints were ‘stronger’, we would be more ‘civilised’ in our behaviour. Freud’s *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1961[1930]) was based on these perhaps overly deterministic ideas, which also had a strong influence on sociologists (who tend to be deterministic). This pair of concepts is, for example, quite prominent in the early thinking of Norbert Elias in *The Civilising Process* (2000 [1939]).

Modern psychoanalysis takes a more fluid view of these matters, contending that an individual is influenced by his or her phantasy structure – clusters of phantasies conscious and unconscious. The phantasies contain both ardent wishes, drawn from a broad range of emotions, and cautions, constraints, and threats of punishment, usually opposing gratification. The stories are introjected in our personal development, from the vast pool of cultural stories (myths), and (apparently) from a kind of folk-memory of stories and sagas experienced by our ancestors, near and remote. The desires and the constraints in the personal phantasies could be seen, as Freud put it, as ‘psychic representatives’ of the Id and Ego. We hypothesise that much the same is true with cultural entities, where needs and desires would be balanced by constraints in the cultural myth-pool.⁸ Although we should have hesitated to suggest this before we conducted our research, we are now inclined to think that there is such a thing as a group phantasy – a collective myth – and that the group storytelling technique of artificially constructing phantasy appears to be a surprisingly effective way of bringing it to the surface.

The first of our ‘stories’ is from a pilot group of students. Of all the stories, this was the least painfully constructed, with participants around the circle contributing a rapid fire of sentences as soon as they were invited.

STORY 1

Once upon a time . . . a little girl lived in a castle. She had no friends except for her dog Chummy. She used to go into the garden sometimes to pick flowers and make daisy chains.

Then one day she went out, and her dog was dead. She was really upset, and she buried him in the pet cemetery. Then all the daisies died; she couldn’t plant daisies on her dog’s grave.

A year later she got over it, and she got a new pet: a baby elephant. She named him Chummy II. She’d bring him for walks into town. People used to stare. He’d trample over all the flower beds, and all the wild daisies. A year previously she’d had no friends; now everybody wanted to be her friend. So she brought them down to the pet cemetery and had a memorial service for Chummy I. They all had tea and sandwiches afterwards. Then they went home and lived happily ever after.

This is what the group said at the next meeting, when we asked them for their associations, when the story was read back to them:

- 'No friends, isolated – that's like us!'
- 'Tea and sandwiches and a pet cemetery – how typically Protestant.'
- 'The new pet, the elephant, was seen both as more assertive and as verging on the destructive ('trampling the wild daisies')
- Death rituals were noted as being important to Protestants – as well as to Catholics.

The second story is from the South Dublin group:

STORY 2

Once upon a time . . .
 There was a little boy . . .
 I was that boy . . .
 who lived in a small country village.
 He had a black mother and a white father.
 He was a very naughty boy . . .
 perhaps because he had ten older sisters,
 who picked on him constantly.
 We were two of those sisters.
 I was the worst, said Caoimhe.
 No wonder he was a bold boy: he was told to wear his sister's clothes.
 That's why we called him a boy/girl.
 There were five white sisters and five black sisters.
 They lived beside a river.
 They were called the chess board family.
 Andrew Kasparov was the father's name.
 Did he play chess?
 No, but his computer did;
 That's why his children were black and white.
 End of story.
 This story was written by a Protestant racist.
 It's a masterpiece.

The following interpretation of story 2 uses psychoanalytic dream analysis technique. The first striking thing about the story is an insistence on two pairs of opposites: black/white and boy/girl. In passing, we may note that the latter is unlikely to have arisen by random chance, because a substantial minority of this group chose alias labels for themselves with names of the opposite gender.

We see that 'the boy' is naughty ('bold') and therefore told to wear his sister's clothes, thereby becoming a boy/girl. This seems to be a statement that there is a blurring, and sometimes an equivalence, between opposites. We can now attempt to relate this to the group's ethnic identity. But remember that no matter how authentic the meaning, interpretation may sound, it is on only one level, whereas it is normal for such material in

individuals to be multi-layered – a feature of the symbolic language and/or of what psychoanalysts call condensation.

As we have seen, there is a tendency in these groups towards self-censorship, with insistent assurances that 'everything is OK; we are all – Catholics and Protestants – the same; what is important is that we are all Irish; don't make waves'. This can be related to the story's blurring of differences between opposites. There may, moreover, be a derisive element here, as if to say, 'Oh yes, we are all the same, just as black is white and boys are girls'.

What about 'I was a naughty boy'? Is it too far-fetched to suggest that this relates to a cultural sense of guilt for the misdeeds of their forebears? If this is true, it may be an important element in the Protestant cultural habitus in the Republic.

If these first two assumptions are correct, then the chessboard represents an aspiration to find a 'black-and-white mix' that retains the integrity of both colours, while mixing closely. This would have the advantage of avoiding two extremes: on the one hand the extreme of a bloc of 'black' squared off against a 'bloc' of white – in ethnic strife, or even civil war; and, on the other hand, the opposite extreme, blending so finely that the result is grey – total assimilation, or cultural suicide. The chessboard represents a form of cultural survival in which both identities are preserved: to call this 'pluralism' or 'multiculturalism' is correct, but shallow and oversimplified.

The statement that 'This story was written by a Protestant racist', together with the undertone of derision, may indicate a form of underground 'racism', which can operate anywhere between a reasonable cultural pride in achievement and an unreasonable arrogance and demeaning of the other culture.

Next, the statement 'It's a masterpiece' can be interpreted to mean that this story is a high-order, sophisticated symbolic statement of the position of the culture in history. If this is so, the river may represent time itself, in addition to representing the Border as one participant suggested when the story was read back at the next meeting. The idea of a summary statement is familiar from individual analysis: after a number of dreams and associations of lower-level elements, a patient often produces a 'summary' dream, or a 'state-of-the-analysis' dream. This story seems like that. It is surprising, and even stunning, to obtain such a summary without the months of preliminary skirmishing to which analysts and therapists are accustomed on the individual level.

CONCLUSIONS: PROTESTANTS AS ESTABLISHED AND OUTSIDERS

We have referred to Protestants as 'established *and* outsiders', an allusion to Norbert Elias's theory of established-outsider relationships. Elias drew ideas of general applicability from a small-scale study that he and John L. Scotson carried out in the late 1950s and early 1960s in a small community near Leicester (Elias and Scotson, 1994 [1965]). The area contained two areas of working-class housing, one dating from the 1880s and the other from the 1930s. The residents of the two areas differed little from each other according to conventional 'objective' sociological measures. The main difference between them was the length of time they had been established in the locality. The older group, the 'Villagers', looked down on the more recent blow-ins of 'the Estate'. One of the most remarkable aspects of Elias's and Scotson's fieldwork was their study of the social role of gossip. The older-established Villagers were linked in a dense social network; over the years, these families had intermarried and were closely connected. Moreover, the 'Villagers' had monopolised the strategic positions in the local networks – the church, the clubs, even the pub. Along these networks, they passed a tide both of 'praise-gossip' about themselves, and 'blame-gossip' chiefly about the benighted residents of the Estate. The praise-gossip was based on a no doubt unrepresentative 'minority of the best' among their own members. The blame-gossip was based on a 'minority of the worst' among the denizens of the Estate, who were depicted as lazy, dirty, drunken, violent and sexually immoral. There was indeed a very small minority of 'problem' families on the Estate, who drank and fought, whose children constituted the local delinquents, and so on. The majority of the Estate people were not like that, and knew that most of them were not. But, lacking the same kind of dense social networks, they were unable to retaliate against the Village with a wave of blame-gossip of their own. And, Elias found, the people of the Estate to some extent accepted the picture painted of their own inferiority by the Villagers. The Villagers' 'they-image' was to some extent incorporated into the 'we-image' of the Estate people.

This paradigm has been shown to apply to the relations between many other groups of people who find themselves having to live together in close proximity and interdependence.¹⁰ It appears to apply in an especially interesting way to the relations of Catholics and Protestants in the twenty-six counties, because the two religious communities have changed positions. The habits of Southern Protestants appears to include elements deriving both from their former established status and from their present outsider status. Although they took great care not to say the sort of

crudely hostile things about Catholics that one might expect to hear from Paisleyites in the North, it was not difficult to detect in the transcripts of our group sessions lingering traces of a sense of superiority. Examples include: Protestant pride in 'being able to think for ourselves';¹⁰ laughing at Catholics going off to Confession (such as after entering a Protestant church, mentioned earlier); and some fairly discreet derision at magical elements in Catholicism, such as statues of Our Lady or making the sign of the cross. The theory of established-outsider relations, as well as our interviews with gatekeepers in the North and the South, would also lead us to look for signs of a well-developed habitual self-restraint being used as a mark of superiority; and anxious striving to be 'good' can approximate to a kind of Puritanism, whether about political, legal, cultural or sexual mores. This, it must be said, can be seen at work on both sides of the religious divide.¹¹

So too are there signs on both sides of the mechanism of outsiders taking the established group's 'they-image' into their own 'we-image' – a mechanism that has a certain affinity with the better-known 'identification with the aggressor'. Historically, that has often been observed about the Catholics in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland; the absorption of elements seemingly derived from Protestant Puritanism into Irish Catholicism has been frequently debated, and Inglis (1998) discusses at length the striving of the Catholic community for 'civilisation' in imitation of the Protestant Ascendancy class. Now there are clear signs of Protestants, in their relatively new role as outsiders, having absorbed some of the negative feelings associated with Catholic views of Protestants. Members of one of our groups self-deprecatingly referred to themselves as 'wishy-washy Protestants'. It was also said that Protestants were once looked up to, but are not now, that a Protestant's word was his bond, but they are now no better than anyone else. To illustrate these perceptions of declining standards, participants pointed to the number of Protestant farmers who now worked on Sundays, and to the number of them who had been found guilty of resorting to 'angel dust' (a facetious popular term for hormones illegally used to bring about rapid growth in cattle).

Protestants in Ireland have much to be proud of, and their pride is linked to their deep wish that their religion and the Protestant community endure in the future. That future is in question, however, partly because of the sheer demographic facts posed by Catholics constituting the overwhelming majority. On the other hand, the moral monopoly of the Catholic Church is visibly weakening. Some far-seeing Protestants in our research groups hinted at a desirable eventual outcome: the 'Protestantisation' of the Catholic Church itself. How likely is this to come about? Tom Inglis, (1998) has argued that the Reformation is coming, late to

Ireland. What with the decline in mass attendance on Sundays, the widespread disaffection of the laity from the formal structures of the church thanks to the recent spate of sexual scandals – and all this built upon a significant extant foundation of *à la carte* Catholicism (for example in respect of contraception, abortion and divorce) – this possibility cannot be dismissed out of hand.