

HISTORIES OF THE SACRED AND SECULAR

REPRESENTING IRISH RELIGIOUS HISTORIES

HISTORIOGRAPHY, IDEOLOGY
AND PRACTICE

JACQUELINE HILL &
MARY ANN LYONS



Histories of the Sacred and Secular, 1700–2000

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Jacqueline Hill • Mary Ann Lyons
Editors

Representing Irish Religious Histories

Historiography, Ideology and Practice

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In memory of
Patrick J. Corish
Finlay Holmes
George Otto Simms

FOREWORD

The richness of this collection shows the current liveliness of Irish religious history. Its buoyancy comes from historians writing from Church of Ireland, Catholic, Presbyterian, and avowedly secular positions. Also, there are more generalised reflections on Irish religious history, specifically in relation to ‘reconciliation’. Furthermore, a broader view of what constitutes religious thinking and practice encourages the re-use of the familiar, engagement with different materials, and the posing of fresh questions. In this light, classics like those by Richard Stanihurst, James Ussher and O’Sullivan Beare can be re-examined, while the ephemeral and frankly partisan such as those by George Stokes, G.V. Jourdan and W.D. Killen, and indeed the hitherto overlooked, attract attention. A collection of unpublished sermons in mid-eighteenth-century Belfast is analysed to reveal differences in the approaches between Protestant dissenters and conformists. Pioneering, too, are investigations of the twentieth-century manuscript sermons of Reverend Ernest Bateman preserved in the Representative Church Body Library in Dublin.

In large measure, the variety and interest of these essays are a tribute to the complex sources from which they have been constructed. In some instances, ambitious and discrete publications, such as John Lanigan, *An ecclesiastical history of Ireland* and Killen’s *Ecclesiastical history of Ireland* are the focus; in others – for example, the poet and novelist Tom Moore – a miscellany, sometimes anonymous, is explored. To these printed works other types of documentation have been added. Newspapers are quarried frequently, charting varying reactions to celebrations and festivals. Also, data generated by recent enquiries, sometimes officially sanctioned and

funded, have been utilized. The new accessibility of the massive – although incomplete and confusing – documentation concerning what was alleged to have happened in parts of Ireland early in the 1640s prompts reflections on how this resource, when made available selectively in schools since 2010, can affect and alter attitudes. The hope that rigid, intolerant and dangerous stances, linked with those visible in the more recent ‘Troubles’, will be re-examined feeds into an aim of reconciliation which – either explicitly or implicitly – animates other offerings. The work of a consultative group on the past in the north of Ireland, connecting with fellowships looking at comparable situations outside Ireland, throws light on what is and is not remembered. Joseph Liechty reminds of the efforts under way already in 1988 when Alan Falconer’s *Reconciling memories* was published. Similar motives explain research into responses to the events of the past forty years in the north of Ireland. Respondents, often active in various religious congregations, have been interviewed in order to assess the importance that they attach to specific events. Surprisingly few of those events still thought to exercise influence today occurred in the seventeenth century. Indeed, 1641 had to be added to the list as a possible source of lasting divisions and resentment, although the initial Ulster plantation itself and the siege of Derry were perceived as grievances. Much of the intention behind these interventions, openly stated, was to reduce the power of remembered or (more often) misremembered events to divide and enrage. Yet, it is acknowledged that gains from a less fiercely contested past can be offset by the loss of any sense as to why such questions should ever have embittered and inflamed.

The sheer volume of new research and thinking can be traced to the availability and popularity of courses which take a broader view of ethical, moral and social issues. The era in which religion was approached primarily through institutions, run typically by the clergy and defined through their writings and commentaries, has given way – although not completely – to one in which the laity is more conspicuous and the informal, social and cultural implications of belief and observance are probed more imaginatively. Faced with the widespread assumption that adamant religious attitudes lie behind the tensions and violence which have often characterised Irish history, there has been an understandable desire to discard such attitudes and also to demonstrate that they have never enjoyed a monopoly. Making amends for past errors has both encouraged admission that they occurred, and insistence that they did not necessarily represent the entire story. Instead it can be shown that a wary coexistence

and day-to-day accommodations between separate confessional communities were possible. An awareness of the damage that resulted from intransigence has strengthened the wish to avoid it in the future. Yet, a salutary reminder of the depth of inherited memories comes from reports on how the teaching based on the 1641 depositions has been received in the north of Ireland. The events have been judged as too remote to have had much contemporary relevance. Indeed, this hints that the strength of religious traditions varies across the island, particularly between the independent south and Northern Ireland, echoes findings as to how the Patrician festival of 1932 and in more recent times St Patrick's Day have been celebrated. The north, more confident thanks to larger numbers of Protestants, needed Patrick less.

The urge towards reconciliation existed alongside resilient notions of orthodoxy. Attachment to traditions of belief and practice, including the sacraments, remained fundamentals over which there could be no compromise with those who treated them simply as indifferent or non-essential. Even in the question of the extent to which the vernacular languages were to be used in instruction, one contribution, considering the Hibernian Bible Society collection at Maynooth, tends to show a generally hesitant attitude within the Catholic church persisting into the twentieth century.

As has been long recognised, what was demanded of lax clergy and wayward laity was an ideal. Dwelling on the failures may too often convey an impression of disquiet and disillusion. Compromises were hardly likely to be advertised in the briefs to clergy and lay-people, nor indeed did they occasion self-congratulation. Nevertheless it is necessary to try to move beyond the official prescripts to what was occurring in and between communities across the island. In any such quest, it is premature to jettison the materials once favoured for the writing of religious history: succession lists of bishops and parochial clergy, records of baptism, marriage and death; fawning requests for clerical advancement. One diocesan bishop – O'Beirne of Meath early in the nineteenth century – attached practical as well as symbolical importance to building churches (preferably on pre-Reformation sites) and fitting houses for the clergy. The moment at which it was deemed too expensive or inappropriate for dignitaries to live, if not in palaces, then in big houses, has yet to be identified precisely. So, too, for whatever motives, the disposal of the accommodation purpose-built for clerics and religious orders, and their dispersal more inconspicuously into their communities. Indeed, even such matters as the abandonment of elaborate or specific clerical attire await a thorough treatment, to ascertain

whether it did – as critics alleged – reveal a loss of nerve, economy or a conscious adoption of reticence. Interiors were purged of furnishings and adornments, which sometimes reappeared in themed bars and restaurants; spaces reordered and accoutrements declared redundant. The shocks and sometimes the destruction resembled that occasioned by earlier iconoclasm, yet remain to be evaluated as factors in lay estrangement from official religion.

As well as embracing unfamiliar kinds of documentation, frequently arising from the recent enquiries, many contributors return to the traditional. Predictable differences of outlook and method can be detected in the treatment of the sixteenth-century Reformations by G. V. Jourdan and R. D. Edwards, although there are no full explanations as to why these learned enquirers did not modify them in the face of evidence. Presbyterian historians are brought out of the shadows, often combative and hopeful of the eventual triumph of their interpretations. The purposes for which religious histories were written and published are considered in the cases of James Kirkpatrick and John McBride. The Presbyterian church, subjected to virulent printed attack early in the eighteenth century, wished to vindicate itself. In some ways, thanks to a shorter and more concentrated story, the distillation of a history was an easier task than for the conformist Protestants or Catholics of Ireland, with a greater abundance of materials. Inevitably, Kirkpatrick and McBride indulged their own prejudices. But their productions represent a vital stage in the history-making.

Direct comparison is made between two Belfast preachers of the mid-eighteenth century, with a suggestion that those of the Church of Ireland concerned themselves less with immediate historical contexts. Writers, when discussed individually, risk being dismissed as idiosyncratic and individualistic unless they can be connected with wider theological and historiographical movements. Sometimes, the circumstances in which the works were composed and published could be revealing. In most instances, they fitted into careers as salaried ministers or academics. Studies were written in order to obtain, or as part of the expected duties of, the post. With what amounted to a public platform, there was an expectation that it would be used to promote rather than to challenge a known view. Divergences and dissent could occur, and were occasionally means to attract notice. But it took the bold or those of independent means to circulate unconventional opinions. Maybe it was not unknown for controversy to be stirred deliberately to increase sales. Whether or not a publication had institutional or even official backing, the extent to which it had been subsidised, and even

the formats and price at which it was sold, deserve some notice if impact is to be assessed. Even so, as several contributors suggest, long and abstruse texts (such as Lanigan's) might be digested and popularised, or simply acquire a totemic reputation notwithstanding their rebarbative nature.

Unpublished sermons are mined for a second time: those of Ernest Bateman, incumbent in the prosperous Dublin suburb of Booterstown (among those who lived in the parish – but obviously did not worship there – was de Valera). Bateman was not shy in sharing his opinions from the pulpit and in letters to the newspapers, but how far he was regarded as anything more than another awkward customer like Hubert Butler is unclear. As always, and in all denominations, the fluent and opinionated catch attention, overshadowing the more conventional but representative.

Attention is usefully directed onto Tom Moore. Thanks to his prestige and popularity as a writer, Moore's backing (albeit passive) of the United Irishmen and defence of moderate Catholicism were likely to attract interest. However, some of his contributions were published anonymously, making their impact hard to gauge. At a time of increased sectarian polarisation, Moore's bid to find and exploit common ground is notable. Unusually among the contributions, that on Moore contrasts the situation in nineteenth-century Ireland with the more relaxed one in Holland, where the different denominations co-operated on moral and social matters. Comparisons can obviously supplement the individual studies. With the proliferation of contextual and comparative accounts of confessional violence in the sixteenth- and seventeenth- centuries, Irish experience has gained. The lesions left in western and central European countries by civil war, occupation, collaboration, vendetta and rival ideologies over the past century resemble – and may often be more severe than – those that disfigure Ireland. The strategies of reconciliation, staged and selective remembrance and individual, inadvertent and collective forgetfulness are recommended responses. Particularly suggestive and wide-ranging is the one chapter by Irene Whelan which brings in north America. There, an Illinois bishop, John Lancaster Spalding, encouraged the settlement of Irish Catholics in frontier areas after the Civil War. He did so because he believed that the Irish had demonstrated an admirable steadfastness and fidelity. Much in this behaviour could be attributed to the 'devotional revolution', engineered earlier in nineteenth-century Ireland. Professor Whelan is alert to the ironies in Spalding's attitude: urban modernism not agrarian regression would characterise émigré Catholicism in America. Yet there was an aptness in a meeting during 1920 in the backwoods between

the temporarily exiled de Valera and the former president of Maynooth College, now a forceful archbishop in Australia, Daniel Mannix. The case is made that under Mannix's tutelage, de Valera came to promote many of the ideals also admired by Bishop Spalding and traceable to the devotional revolution.

Running rather against the schemes to dull painful memories, much of the evidence analysed in the chapters shows the persistence of inconvenient and unyielding beliefs. Behaviour, which, in some interpretations, endangered immortal souls and the salvation of a community, might escape public condemnation, but was neither unnoticed nor condoned. Only by examining more individual and individualistic reactions, stimulated by the work offered here, can full justice be done to the often unexpected and sometimes contradictory religious lives of Ireland.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, heightened interest in the relationship between religion and historical scholarship has given rise to a growing corpus of secondary literature exploring subjects as diverse as identity, ideology, intellectual life, propaganda, commemoration, religious and civil liberties, and the nature of secularization. Several of these themes are explored in depth in other volumes in the series ‘Histories of the Sacred and Secular, 1700–2000’, of which this collection forms part. In an Irish context, too, this lively scholarly interest is reflected in a range of publications, including John Wolffe’s edited volume *Irish religious conflict in comparative perspective* (2014; also in this series); in numerous journal articles, and in a forthcoming volume on the Church of Ireland and its histories (Four Courts Press, 2017).

This collection starts from the premise that until very recently, religion has been particularly influential in Ireland in forming a sense of identity, and in creating and supporting specific versions of reality. History has been a key component in that process, and the historical evolution of Christianity has been appropriated and publicised by the main religious denominations throughout the country – Catholic, Church of Ireland, and Presbyterian – with a view to reinforcing their own particular identities. A desire to explore some of the many and varied ways in which this came about, through the writing of religious history, and some of the manifestations of that process, underpins this collection. Also included are chapters that discuss current and recent attempts to examine the legacy of collective religious memory, notably in Northern Ireland, based on projects designed to encourage self-conscious reflection about the religious past, among both adults and school children.

The collection is intended mainly for readers who are interested in the contribution of history writing and interpretations of the past to the process of identity-formation and religious polarisation in Ireland. It aims to inform both those who approach the subject from an academic viewpoint, and those who are interested in how the historiography of religion and the investigation of collective memory can contribute to the process of reconciliation.

There are three parts to this collection. During the seventeenth century the basis was laid for distinct denominational interpretations of Irish religious history. Part 1, therefore, begins by examining some of the key figures who in different ways were at the cutting edge of writing about Irish religious history at that time, including Catholic émigré scholars, and Protestants who contributed an Irish historical dimension to the practice of the eucharist. The penal laws of the following century were not conducive to religious historiography; but tensions between the established church and dissenters did have historiographical dimensions. Meanwhile, in the nineteenth century relations between Protestants and Catholics again became polarised, with the Church of Ireland increasingly anxious to act on its perceived mission to become the church of the people (as well as of the state), and Catholics resisting this. The growing importance of ultramontanism in the Catholic church also played a part, and Irish religious history was drawn into a new phase of confessional rivalry. As the century went on, Catholic historians (increasingly attracted to sources indicating that Ireland's strong ties with Rome dated back to the origins of Christianity), built on the work of their seventeenth-century antecedents; while Protestant historians, equally looking back to seventeenth-century scholarship, preferred sources suggesting that the early Irish church was effectively or entirely independent of Rome. The often obscure and inconclusive nature of the records for early Irish Christianity offered scope for such polarised attitudes, which persisted into and even beyond the era, especially from about the 1930s onwards, when Irish historiography was beginning to become more self-consciously 'scientific' and objective in its values. Before that development – as was commonplace throughout Europe before the emergence of the historical profession at the end of the nineteenth century – writers of religious history were for the most part ordained members of their respective churches, Catholic, Protestant, and Presbyterian. Chief among the contested topics under discussion by the writers considered in Part 1 were the legacy of St Patrick, the nature of

early Irish Christianity, and the nature and impact of the Reformation in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ireland.

Part 2 considers perceptions of church history held in broader Catholic, Church of Ireland, and Presbyterian circles during this period, and identifies some of the various ways in which they were expressed. Attitudes are considered in contexts including the parochial, architectural, literary, linguistic, commemorative, and in Irish-America. The early chapters in Part 2 reflect the fact that during the eighteenth century there was some diminution in the overt Catholic–Protestant polarisation that had been so characteristic of the previous century. However, in the nineteenth and for much of the twentieth century such polarised versions of Irish history once again became the norm, not alone for church historians but for Irish people more generally.

Part 3 focuses on twentieth-century developments, and particularly on the period from the 1980s onwards. This period witnessed a willingness to take a fresh look at religious polarisation across the entire island, and to examine the role of religious history in that polarisation. It includes discussion of some case studies of attempts, past and current, to foster a more critical approach to collective memory in the sphere of Irish religious history, and also some reflections on the role of historians in the process of reconciliation.

Jacqueline Hill
Mary Ann Lyons

NUI Maynooth

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Jacqueline Hill
Mary Ann Lyons
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ABBREVIATIONS

AOH	Ancient Order of Hibernians
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BFBS	British and Foreign Bible Society
<i>Cal. S.P. Ire.</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers Ireland</i>
CoI	Church of Ireland
<i>DIB</i>	<i>Dictionary of Irish Biography</i>
HBS	Hibernian Bible Society
HC	House of Commons
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
IBM	International Business Machines
IMC	Irish Manuscripts Commission
ICM	Society for the Irish Church Missions
MP	Member of Parliament
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
NICIE	Northern Irish Council for Integrated Education
N.T.	New Testament
NUI Maynooth	National University of Ireland Maynooth
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RC	Roman Catholic
RCB Library	Representative Church Body Library
SPCK	Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge
TCD	Trinity College, Dublin
TD	Teachta Dála (Member of Dáil Éireann)
UCD	University College Dublin

CONVENTIONS

There is no wholly straightforward terminology available for the three main religious denominations discussed in this collection. During the seventeenth century, members of the established Church of Ireland were inclined to use the term ‘Protestant’ for themselves, referring to members of other reformed churches as ‘non-conformists’, or ‘dissenters’ (and see Robert Armstrong’s chapter below for early use of the term ‘Presbyterian’ in the Irish context). From the nineteenth century onwards the term ‘Anglican’ also entered into common usage for the established church. In this collection the term ‘Protestant’ refers to members of the Church of Ireland; in the (rare) cases where it includes members of other reformed churches this will be clear from the context.

As for the term ‘Catholic’, during the seventeenth century Protestants of all denominations often used terms such as ‘papist’ or ‘Romanist’ to denote their main rivals. It should be noted that ‘high’ church members of the Church of Ireland were apt to describe their own faith as ‘Catholic’ (‘universal’), and (particularly once the penal laws began to be relaxed) to refer to their rivals as ‘Roman Catholics’. In this collection, the term ‘Catholic’ will be applied to members of the church that looked to the pope as its head; where there is any danger of confusion, the term ‘Roman Catholic’ is used.