

From Galway to Cloyne, and Beyond: Tracing the Cultural Legacy of Irish Catholicism

Introduction

Bind us together, Lord
Bind us together
With cords that cannot be broken
Bind us together, Lord
Bind us together
Bind us together in Love
There is only one God,
There is only one King
There is only one Body,
That is why we sing.

On a sunny 30 September 1979, in Ballybrit racecourse in Galway, over 200,000 young people listened to two of Ireland's most popular clerics sing the hymn 'Bind us Together', and the performance was given rapturous applause. One of the singers was Eamon Casey, Bishop of Galway. Casey was one of the best-known and most popular members of the hierarchy. Telegenic, baby-faced, funny, a man of passionate convictions, and a long-time critic of the government's lack of spending on charity. In fact, as chairman of the organisation *Trócaire*, he was adept at politicising this charity work and refused to meet President Ronald Reagan on his visit to Ireland in 1984, as a result of US policy in Central America. He was often on the *Late Late Show*, where his skills as a raconteur were show-cased, and he was seen as a very human cleric at a time when the priestly vocation was often still viewed as an austere calling. In addition, Casey was known as a bon viveur who enjoyed socialising and driving fast cars. He was a major force in Irish society, especially when it came to presenting a human face of a monolithic organisation such as the Catholic Church. Casey had charisma, the common touch. He had his finger on the pulse of the Ireland of the 1980s, a time of economic freefall and increasing dissatisfaction with both Church and State.

His partner on the stage in Galway was Father Michael Cleary, a man from the working class area of Ballyfermot in Dublin. He was known as the singing-priest and presented his own radio show on a station that had a very large following among young people, 98FM. He had a strong commitment to charity and to enlightening people about inner-city deprivation, and was a tireless worker for people in ghetto areas of Dublin. Doctrinally conservative, as indeed was Casey, he voiced the stricter message of Church teaching, especially on matters of sexuality. In 1992, on the *Late Late Show* (he was also quite a regular contributor to this programme also), while discussing the 'X Case', a situation involving a 14 year-old girl who travelled to England for an abortion after becoming pregnant as a result of rape, he maintained that the whole thing was an elaborate test case orchestrated by liberal groups and the media. At a time when Irish public opinion was becoming polarised between those who believed in 'the right to life' and those who were in 'the right to choose' camp, Cleary's voice was a clear one. He stood firmly behind the Church's doctrines.

So, as Ireland's most famous and media-friendly clerics sang on the open stage of the racecourse in Galway, awaiting the arrival of the most charismatic and media-friendly pontiff in the history of the Catholic Church, the eyes of the whole country were fixed on them. The Pope spoke to the 200,000 young people in tones that predicted confidently that the synergy (or perhaps even collusion), between the Catholic Church and the Irish State would endure and strengthen:

I believe in youth with all my heart and all the strength of my conviction. And today I say: I believe in the youth of Ireland. I believe in you who stand here before me, in every one of you. When I look at you, I see the Ireland of the future. Tomorrow you will be the living force of your country, you will decide what Ireland will be. Tomorrow, as technicians or teachers, nurses or secretaries, farmers or tradesmen, doctors or engineers, priests or religious - tomorrow you will have the power to make dreams come true. (*Pope in Ireland* 2004, 46)

The words of the opening hymn were proleptic of this continued union, as the Church and State were, and would continue to be, 'one body', and the binding blocks did not look to be in danger of being dismantled at any point in the foreseeable future. In the dawning of a media-saturated age, these three representatives of Roman Catholicism had taken control of the medium and made it their own. Much of Ireland only had a single TV channel and the audience figures for the Pope's visit were huge. The

tone of all of the broadcasts was reverential and sombre, and the images that remain from the visit are ones of Mass celebrations, a sense of community at worship, and no real deviation from this monological message from a pastor to his flock.

During his visit, the Pope went to Dublin, Drogheda, Clonmacnoise, Galway Knock and Limerick, and some thirty years later, in 2009, a report was issued which referred to the Limerick stage of the papal visit. Here the pope spoke about the family and children, and, particularly, the importance of the latter in the Christian vision of the family:

And here, I want to say a very special word to all Irish parents. Marriage must include openness to the gift of children. Generous openness to accept children from God as the gift to their love is the mark of a Christian couple. (*Pope in Ireland 2004*, 85)

However, the report did not refer to the full content of the Pope's speech, even though it was concerned with the treatment of children in Church-run institutions. Instead, it referred more generally to the special occasion that was the papal visit. In volume 2, chapter 3 of the *Ryan Report*, the colloquial name for the findings of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, published on May 20, 2009, we find reference to a more sinister side of Irish Catholicism, and to the period of the Pope's visit in particular. In this section, the subject is St Joseph's Industrial School, Ferryhouse, Clonmel ('Ferryhouse'), from 1885–1999. The part of the report, which is of particular relevance to us, is dated the 1 of October 1979, and makes for harrowing reading:

The other boy was sent for, and Fr Stefano described how *'the two boys sat in my office and unfolded to me a most horrific story of what had been happening to them'*. The boys told Fr Stefano story after story of cruelty and abuse. The worst, as far as he was concerned, was the abuse of one of the boys during the Pope's visit to Ireland in 1979. The whole school went to see the Pope in Limerick, except for one of the two boys who was not allowed to go because of his record of absconding. Br Bruno volunteered to stay back and supervise him. The boy told Fr Stefano that, when the rest of the boys left, *'this Brother came and raped me in my bed'*. (Ryan 2009 III, 2, 87)

Therefore, while the pope was speaking about the value of children in the Catholic worldview, some 40 miles away, a Rosminian brother was raping 2 boys who had been placed under his care by both the Catholic Church and the State.

This provides a sharp contrast to the euphoria engendered by the papal visit, and adds an ironic touch both to the hymn, 'Bind Us Together', and to the words of the Pope to the youth of Ireland: 'Young people of Ireland, I love you'. Indeed, it also points a finger at the fraudulent character of the two singing clerics. In 1992, Bishop Eamon Casey admitted that he had had an affair with a woman, Annie Murphy, and that he was father to her son, Patrick. In his turn, one year later, after his death in 1993, it was revealed that Michael Cleary had a sexual relationship with his housekeeper Phyllis Hamilton for a number of years. Their son, Ross, lived with the couple without ever being acknowledged as Fr. Cleary's offspring. It was also stated that they had another child who had been given up for adoption. Needless to say, there were massive denials of these stories and once more, on the ever-influential *Late Late Show*, in April 1993, Annie Murphy was given a very hostile reception by the host, Gay Byrne, and by a number of Casey's relatives who were in the audience. There was still a strong hegemonic attachment to Catholicism as 'our' religion and as a social cement, which bonded most Irish people together. It was less a devotional or religious affiliation, but rather an ideological and cultural identification that was non-intellectual and unthinking. There was a cultural and ideological symphysis between church and state that was taken for granted by all.

These two events shook the credibility of the Church to the core, and, interestingly, in both cases it was the media which broke the stories. The Dublin magazine *The Phoenix* was the source of the revelations about Michael Cleary while *The Irish Times* reported initially on the Annie Murphy story. Thus, it was the cultural sphere within which the initial stages of unbinding began to take place. Newspapers, documentaries, television and radio reports, along with literary depictions, began to take issue with the received views of the Church, and the reverential tones of the premier television Current Affairs reporter, Brian Farrell, as he intoned a descriptive narrative of the papal visit in 1979, was gradually replaced by more critical voices with respect to the actions of the clergy and the organisation and system as a whole. Thus, for example, 'in November 1994, RTÉ devoted to it a special edition of *Tuesday File*, which included one of the earliest televised interviews with a victim

of clerical sex abuse' (Kenny 2009, 64), which discussed the case of Father Brendan Smyth, who was wanted for child abuse in Northern Ireland, but whose extradition had been delayed in the Republic. A year later, in October 1995, a special edition of *Counterpoint*, entitled *Suffer Little Children*, broadcast on UTV¹, caused shock and consternation in the Republic (Kenny 2009, 65). These programmes put clerical sexual abuse in the public sphere, a sphere that was gradually loosening the binding connection with the Church. A number of clerics came before the courts, as people who had repressed memories of abuse now found the courage to come forward. Names like Father Ivan Payne, Father Seán Fortune and Father Paul McGennis became part of an ongoing list of proven abusers. The media focus on this issue continued the following year: Kenny notes that:

Nuns as well as priests were occasionally implicated in allegations of sexual abuse. On 22 February 1996, RTÉ screened *Dear Daughter*, a documentary by Louis Lentin that revealed through interviews what life had been like during the late 1950s and early 1960s for some children at the Goldenbridge Orphanage, Dublin, run by the Sisters of Mercy. (Kenny 2009, 65)

This caused the Mercy order, who ran this institution, to apologise publically, an unthinkable act only a few years earlier.

However, the beginning of the real crisis in Irish Catholicism was Mary Raftery's trilogy of documentaries, *States of Fear*, broadcast on 27 April and 4 and 7 May 1999, where sexual, physical and psychological abuse across a range of Industrial Schools was analysed and brought into the open on a grand scale. In the wake of this programme, significantly more people came forward to detail instances of abuse, and the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, apologised on behalf of the State. The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse was established a year later and delivered its report in May 2009. Much worse was to come in the exposure of clerical abuse scandals contained in the Ferns (2005), Ryan and Murphy (both in 2009), and Cloyne (2011) reports, which revealed an institutional mindset that bears all the hallmarks of "groupthink" (Kenny, 2011; F. Murphy, Buckley, Dr Helen

¹ In 1999, Eoin O'Sullivan and Mary Rafferty published a book with the very similar title, *Suffer the Little Children*, a hugely damaging exposure of the abuse that characterised Ireland's Industrial Schools. The title is an ironic reference to the Bible's mention of the special place of children in God's heart: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God.'

and Joyce, Dr Laraine 2005; Y. Murphy, 2009; Ryan, 2009). These reports concretised a gradual process of secularisation, influenced heavily by access to a global media, the internet and hundreds of television channels

On July 20, 2011, the Taoiseach Enda Kenny made a strong speech on the relationship between church and state in a manner which would have been unthinkable in the 1970s especially as Kenny is probably an average and conservative catholic in his personal life. In this speech, he went on to excoriate the Catholic Church and to make a telling point in terms of a separation of church and state here. Kenny spoke of what he termed ‘clericalism’ and stressed how the ‘rape and torture of children were downplayed or “managed” to uphold instead, the primacy of the institution, its power, standing and “reputation”’ (Kenny 2011). More tellingly, he went on to stress that the church was one organisation within the state, and that it could no longer see it self as politically and culturally hegemonic. The standards that the church saw as appropriate for its own governance ‘cannot and will not, be applied to the workings of democracy and civil society in this republic’ (Kenny 2011). When looks back to how the nation as a whole stood still in 1979 for the papal visit, there has clearly been a sea-change in attitudes here, and it is a change voiced in the very heart of government, but even more importantly, one broadcast on RTE. Indeed, on researching (or googling as it is now known) the speech on the internet, the RET website is the first site that appears, and indeed it is the source of these quotations. This means that the country as a whole heard this speech, or at least the significant sections and it made the front page of all the papers in the Republic of Ireland the following day. Kenny’s articulation of a twenty first century Ireland as a ‘Republic of laws, of rights and responsibilities, of proper civic order, where the delinquency and arrogance of a particular kind of “morality” will no longer be tolerated or ignored’ (Kenny 2011) was a moment which encapsulated the fall from grace of an institution that had hitherto been culturally indistinguishable from Ireland as a nation. It is this fall from grace of the church as a cultural phenomenon in Irish society that will be the focus of this book.

It is clear from this brief rehearsal of events that between 1979 and 2009, a sea-change (one could even say ‘unbinding’) occurred in the perception of the Catholic Church, and in the relationship between Church and State. The representation of the Pope’s visit as a type of spiritual homecoming

in 1979, as a bringing together of a pastor and his people, and of a Church and its State, and the report in a state document, 30 years later, of an act of child abuse in a Church-run institution, are two very significant highlights in this process. The medium and the message are inextricably connected, and as Church control over the cultural sphere was gradually attenuated, that sphere became more critical of the Church as institution and as system. The power of the Church was in many ways a soft power, one which was set out in legalistic canon law and enforced through control over health and education, but which maintained and replicated its power through ideology. Like all ideology, it was culturally mediated through education, writing, television and radio. As Terry Eagleton has observed, ‘an ideology exists because there are certain things which must not be spoken of’ (Eagleton 1986, 90), and in Ireland during that period, this was definitely the case. The Church had an undue influence over how Irish society educated its young, treated the sick and wrote its laws. Even the constitution of Ireland had been shown to the hierarchy before it was passed in parliament to make sure that Church and State spoke with one voice on topics that were seen to impact on the Church’s role as moral custodian of a nation.

The journey from Galway to Cloyne, spanning over 30 years, was a journey of separation and of delegitimisation of the Church and its role in Ireland. A gradual process of disintegration took place as the media, whose deferential tone to the Church was clear in the number of times priests and bishops were given very positive coverage on television and in the newspapers, had their own radio shows, and were often presented and interviewed in a deferential manner. Censorship, which remained strong in terms of what was allowed to be read in Ireland up to the 1980s, was a further controlling factor in mediating the position of the Church and creating that ‘one body’ of which the aforementioned hymn speaks. Louis Althusser, writing about the maintenance and renewal of power, speaks of how soft power, or ideology, is the means by which a ruling elite maintains itself in power, and also maintains the hierarchy of relationships which acknowledge that power apparatuses may teach ‘know-how’, but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its ‘practice’ (Althusser 2001, 133). Althusser’s studies of ideology at work are especially pertinent to this book, which looks at how culture helped to reinforce, and also deconstruct, Catholic hegemony in Ireland, while also examining how, in many ways, the Irish unconscious can be seen to be strongly

influenced by the remnants of Catholic rituals and beliefs. Althusser noted that during the Middle Ages in Europe, 'the Church' was the 'religious ideological State apparatus' and that 'alongside the Church there was the family Ideological State Apparatus, which played a considerable part, incommensurable with its role in capitalist social formations' (Althusser 2001, 151. In this period of European history, the Church set out the laws and codes of society and these were communicated to the next generations through the medium of family: it is interesting to note that in his sermons on his Irish trip, the Pope mentioned the family 16 times, an index of its importance to Catholic ideological practice. This is central to Althusser's thesis:

In the pre-capitalist historical period which I have examined extremely broadly, it is absolutely clear that *there was one dominant Ideological State Apparatus, the Church*, which concentrated within it not only religious functions, but also educational ones, and a large proportion of the functions of communications and 'culture'. (Althusser 2001, 151 [*italics original*])

In Ireland of the late 1970s, this was still largely true, mainly as a result of its island status and its colonial history which meant that intellectual movements like the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment were largely offset in an Irish context by the stifling rule exercised over it by the United Kingdom. While Europe was moving through ideological revolutions, Ireland was mired in colonial and political struggles, following the almost paradigmatic Third World colonial narrative of ethnic revivalist movements, revolution, and then partition, followed by civil war. Through all of this strife, the power of the Church was never questioned and, indeed, Church and State entered into a symbiotic relationship on the achievement of independence in 1922. So while one of the key achievements of the French Revolution was the 'creation of new ideological State apparatuses to replace the religious ideological State apparatus in its dominant role' (Althusser 2001, 152), there was no such parallel process in Ireland. Here the Church and State were bound together, although, as we will point out, these tight cords were becoming looser by 1979. When we say Church and State, what we mean is the ruling classes of the time, as 'the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force', a point made by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 67 [*italics original*]). In the Irish context, these intellectual ideas

were dominated and shaped by Catholic doctrine, which resulted, quite logically, in a Catholic ethos permeating Irish intellectual and cultural life.

Catholic culture was Irish culture and it is again no accident that there were 26 mentions of society in the papal sermons of 1979, none more exemplary than this one:

Yes, Ireland, that has come overcome so many difficult moments in her history, is being challenged in a new way today, for she is not immune from the influence of ideologies and trends which present-day civilisation and progress carry with them. The very capability of mass media to bring the whole world into your homes produces a new kind of confrontation with values and trends that up until now have been alien to Irish society. Pervading materialism imposes its dominion on man today in many different forms and with aggressiveness that spares no one. The most sacred principles, which were the sure guides for the behaviour of individuals and society, are being hollowed-out by false pretences concerning freedom, the sacredness of life, the indissolubility of marriage, the true sense of human sexuality, the right attitude towards the material goods that progress has to offer. Many people now are tempted to self-indulgence and consumerism, and human identity is often defined by what one owns. Prosperity and affluence, even when they are only beginning to be available to larger strata of society, tend to make people assume that they have a right to all that prosperity can bring, and thus they can become more selfish in their demands. (*Pope in Ireland* 2004, 6)

The fear of the mass media and consumer culture is a fear of the very processes sketched by Althusser in continental Europe. The adequation between Church and State is clearly under threat when capitalism and consumerist culture offers a complication of the hitherto dyadic relationship of the two traditional power blocks of Irish life. In the face of these threats, a later sermon by John Paul II harks back to a time when:

Ireland ... displayed a remarkable interpenetration of her whole culture, speech and way of life by the things of God and the life of grace. Life was in a sense organised around religious events. The task of this generation of Irish men and women is to transform the more complex world of modern industrial and urban life by the same Gospel spirit. (*Pope in Ireland* 2004, 83-84)

The ideology of this sermon corresponds to what Roland Barthes terms 'mythology'. In this eulogising of a simpler time, a time where the choices were not as difficult for a person with religious

convictions, myth, as Barthes puts it, 'acts economically' in that it 'it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organises a world without contradictions' (Barthes 1986:143). What these sermons show is an awareness of the power of culture and ideology as a means of maintaining power and hegemony, and also a fear of counter-cultural perspectives which would dilute and deconstruct such hegemonic positions by offering alternatives. A mass-media, not subject to Church control, could cause serious unbinding between Church and State, and this concern would prove to be proleptic of what would transpire in Ireland over the next 30 to 40 years, as the ideology of the Church and State was gradually deconstructed by a more secular and pluralistic ideology. In these sermons, and in the visit as a whole, there was an attempt being made to bring Ireland back from the brink of a more pluralistic and secular culture and to espouse instead a more traditional one. Like all ideological imperatives, this one attempted to 'establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical', because 'ideology, broadly speaking, is meaning in the service of power' (Thompson 1990:7).

We have stressed how the Catholic version of 'meaning' was the only one available in the Ireland of the 1970s but this book will trace the gradual pluralisation and globalisation of the transmitters of meaning in this period. From 1955, British television channels were available in Belfast and along the east coast of Ireland. RTÉ, the Irish television network, was set up in 1961, and a single channel, very much in keeping with the broadly Catholic ethos of the country was available from that year, with a second channel becoming available in 1978. However, the British and commercial channels were available in the east coast, albeit with very poor reception until the setting up of a cable service, called RTÉ Relays, in 1963 which provided better reception. In 1974, Waterford set up a cable service and by the early 1980s, Limerick and Cork were part of this new multi-channel service. The importance of these channels in the dismantling of Catholic socio-cultural hegemony cannot be overstated, as perspectives on social and moral issues, which were non-Catholic, and in some cases, non-religious, became part of the conversation in living rooms and in public houses, and the parameters of debate were gradually broadened. Thus what had been taken as orthodox opinions on homosexuality, contraception, divorce and abortion, were now called into

question, and also the process of liberalising social legislation to bring Ireland into line with the other secular European countries in the EU continued apace. What was especially significant was that opinions, which were contrary to Catholic doctrine, were not seen as aberrant or radical on BBC or ITV, but were discussed as just another in a series of options. This defamiliarisation of non-Catholic perspectives had an accretive effect, as younger people in particular often turned to the media for their opinions, whereas heretofore, they had looked to the Church.

Cultural, ethical and moral issues, especially those dealing with sexual morality, became the cultural battleground in these years, with the media voicing a more secular, European and Anglo-American perspective than had heretofore been the case. Also, increasing mobility between European countries through Erasmus exchanges of students and academics, allied to media representations, demonstrated that the Catholicism of France, Spain and Italy was very different to that of Ireland, where Church and State were very closely allied. The advent of films, books, discussions, newspapers that took more secular positions on issues that had been seen as firmly within the Catholic Church's purview, gradually eroded the hegemonic certainties and offered alternatives. Take for example the views expressed by the French priest-writer, Jean Sulivan (1913-1980), in his spiritual journal, *Morning Light*:

I see the Church detaching its members from structures of profit, conventional security, and mythologies of happiness in order to make them spiritual nomads, capable of commitment without illusion, always ready to absent themselves in order to go somewhere else, straining for the impossible and necessary. (Sulivan 1988, p.158)

This original vision of a Church rediscovering the richness of the original intentions of its founder, demonstrates the degree to which Sulivan appreciated the need for a genuine re-evaluation of the Catholicism's role in French society, and makes him a most interesting counterfoil to the dominant ideology in Ireland up until recently. The Irish hierarchy, used to blind obedience on the part of a subservient laity, were neither intellectually nor ideologically equipped to engage in debate, and this further lessened the respect in which they were held. The absence of a strong philosophical training in the Irish educational system also militated against a Catholic intellectual laity (where is there an Irish equivalent to Jacques Maritain?) which could argue cogently on issues of a moral or theological

nature. One could see the respective falls of Casey and Cleary from grace as emblematic of a more gradual and accretive process wherein respect for the Church was gradually but inexorably eroded in the cultural sphere. We are stressing the cultural nature of this battleground, as it was in this arena that the debates were held, and it was culturally, rather than through any issues of belief or ritual, that the influence of Catholicism became subject to critique

It is difficult to capture in a brief Introduction the full dismantling of the once dominant force that was Irish Catholicism. Even in 1979, which some wrongly view as the apogee of the Catholic Church in this country, secularism was on the rise, as more and more young people availed of free education and, as a result, managed to secure better-paid jobs that ensured their economic independence. Attending university, while still largely the purview of the privileged classes, became far more accessible to the general population. It is likely that the startling fall in vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and the increasing challenge to the Church's stances on issues pertaining to human sexuality, were among the main reasons that prompted the Pope to visit Ireland in 1979. Rather than being a triumphalist visit, it was an attempt to lessen the tide of secularism and to re-energise the faithful. However, in spite of the personal success enjoyed by Pope John Paul during his time in Ireland, the situation of the Church did not improve in the 1980s and 1990s, which were characterised by divisive referenda on contraception, divorce and abortion. A more educated, liberal, urban population found it increasingly difficult to submissively obey Catholic teaching when it came to what happened between consenting adults in the privacy of their bedroom. In this regard, the opinion expressed by the novelist Roddy Doyle (born in 1958) in an interview with Caramine White, is indicative of a resentment of the Church's attempt to set the agenda on areas which went beyond its remit, in the writer's view. When asked why there is such an absence of religion in his books, Doyle replied:

There's no religion in me own life, for certain, I've no room for it at all. It's difficult in a country like Ireland because you do have to put your face out and tell it to go away – "Fuck off." You have to be quite blunt to allow yourself your own agnostic space. (White 2001, 168)

Creating his 'own agnostic space' was clearly a priority for Doyle, who as a private citizen fervently supported the 'Yes' campaign for divorce in 1996. Because its influence was all-pervasive in Irish society, the only way to free yourself from its shackles was, in Doyle's forthright phrase, to tell it to "Fuck off". In his view, the referendum on divorce was not simply about the right to legally dissolve marriage; instead it was more concerned with the Catholic Church's desire to dictate what it meant to be Irish. He noted in an interview with Liam Fay: 'It basically was the Catholic Church against everyone else. It was the insistence that if you're Irish, you're white and you're Catholic as well, and if you're not both of these things then you're not fully Irish. Ultimately, that is what it was all about....' (Fay 1996, 19). This perspective offers a stark contrast to some of the main canonical figures in Irish literature of the previous generation such as Friel, McGahern and Heaney, all of whom, although they had long ceased practicing their religion, had a reverence for the rituals and ceremonies of the Catholic Church, which they saw in some ways as the language of their youth, as part of a shared cultural consciousness. It is interesting that both McGahern and Heaney were buried in their local parish cemeteries with all the trimmings, including the funeral Mass and a decade of the rosary at the graveside. The reason for this had as much to do with their respect for local custom as to any deeply-held religious belief, but it is significant for all that. In his memorable essay, 'The Church and its Spire', McGahern summed up his relationship with the Catholic Church in the following manner:

I was born into Catholicism as I might have been born into Buddhism or Protestantism or any of the other isms or sects, and brought up as a Roman Catholic in the infancy of this small state when the Church has almost total power: it was the dominating force of my whole upbringing, education and early working life. (McGahern 2009, 133)

McGahern's position was that, for all that the Church was by times patriarchal, authoritarian, responsible for promoting an unhealthy attitude to human sexuality, it also had these wonderful religious ceremonies that brightened up his otherwise largely uneventful life growing up in Leitrim and Roscommon. His great regret was that Irish Catholicism opted for the Romanesque spirit, 'the low roof, the fortress, the fundamentalists' pulpit-pounding zeal, the darkly ominous and fearful warnings to transgressors' (McGahern 2009, 145), rather than embracing the Gothic form, with its

impressive spires which raised man's look from the avaricious earth and helped him to imagine the transcendent. A member of a later generation of writers, Anne Enright, describes a starkly different reaction to religious ceremonies than one finds in McGahern. Take the following extract from the award-winning novel, *The Gathering*:

The drab days of Lent are over, the Legion's mission has been triumphant, the brothels have been raided by the police, sprinkled with holy water, brought off by Frank Duff, and closed down. A great religious procession has been held and a cross raised in Purdon Street by the man himself, who stood up on a kitchen table and drove in the nail with a surprisingly large hammer. Twenty girls had been decanted into the Sancta Maria hostel and dried out at either end. Everyone has been praying day and night, night and day, until they are fed up with it, the whole city has had it up to here, they have suffered the ashes and kissed the rood and felt truly, deeply, spiritually *cleaned out*: Easter dawns, thanks be to the Jay, and when they have eaten and laughed and looked at the daffodils they go up to bed to make love (it's a long time, forty days) and have a big sleep and, the next morning, they all go off to the races. (Enright 2008, 105).

What is noticeable in this passage is the scepticism and drudgery that are associated with the ceremonies of Lent. It is a period that one must get through, because as a Catholic it was mandatory. The great champion of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association and the Legion of Mary, Frank Duff, is given honourable mention for nailing a cross into a kitchen 'with a surprisingly large hammer' (the irony is not lost on the reader) and bringing alcohol-addicted women into a hostel to dry out. There is no hint of an appreciation of the positive side of Catholicism in this passage: everything is couched in an imposed type of mechanical religiosity, which, once completed, will not have left any spiritual imprint. It strikes me that it is no coincidence that both Doyle and Enright are primarily novelists concerned with Dublin and its environs, something which has imbued them with a different perspective on Catholicism than that of the rural-based Friel, McGahern and Heaney. They are also the first generation of writers to emerge from the shadow of these giants and their experience of Catholicism is noticeably different. Whatever the position they adopt in relation to Catholicism, however, it is clear that they provide an invaluable gauge as to what the public reaction is to religion at a certain period and in a certain milieu.

A more recent literary exposé of the changed dynamic of Irish Catholicism can be found in John Boyne's *A History of Loneliness*, which charts the solitude and disillusionment of Father Odhran Yates with the way in which his vocation to the priesthood is called into question by the actions of his friend from his seminary days, Father Tom Cardle, who abuses several children, including Yates' own nephew. Yates has plenty of reason for not trusting Cardle, and yet he allowed him to stay in his sister's house the night of the funeral of their mother, where he would have access to a trusting, innocent boy. Cardle confronts Yates with staying quiet for fear of provoking a scandal:

You knew it, you kept it secret and this whole conspiracy that everyone talks about, the one that goes to the top of the Church, well it goes to the bottom of it too, to the nobodies like you, to the fella that never even had a parish of his own and hides away from the world, afraid to be spotted. You can blame me all you like, Odhran, and you'd be right to, because I've done some terrible things in my life. But do you ever think of taking a look at yourself? At your own actions? At the Grand Silence that you've maintained from the very first day? (Boyne 2014, 377)

One wonders at the extent to which this accusation could be equally levelled at priest and laity alike, as they blandly looked the other way when crimes of a heinous nature were being committed against defenceless young children. Irish society was complicit in these crimes, a fact that is often conveniently ignored in the rush to heap blame on the Church.

In her defining study, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, historian Louise Fuller pointed out that the 1960s encyclical *Humanae Vitae* galvanised public opinion in a way not previously witnessed in Ireland, something which she attributes to a society that was becoming more exposed to liberal values through the arrival of the television set in many homes and through increased access to foreign travel. She continues:

The questioning of Church authority has to be seen against the backdrop of a worldwide phenomenon characterised by many people's desire to break free of the shackles of authority. The gloom of the post-war era was past. Man was about to reach the moon. Economic affluence, educational opportunities, the communications revolution and increased mobility made his horizons seem limitless. It was the era of individualism, 'flower-power', 'free love' and 'hanging loose'. (Fuller 2004, 198)

Until then, the voice of authority was singular; it came from the pulpit on a Sunday and papal and episcopal letters could be read in every church, which achieved an almost saturation effect in terms of the dissemination of Roman Catholic ideology. New voices of authority now competed with the Church, and these voices, from educated presenters and panellists, steadily insinuated themselves into the corners of Irish living rooms. A couple of decades later, the ‘baby boomer’ generation would have come into its own, which spelled trouble for the continued hegemony of the Church. Clearly, people who during their youth had challenged the ruling elites were not, in middle age, going to succumb to their ongoing interference.

While we have spent some time looking at the effects of change on the country and the laity, it is also necessary to examine how secular change and the delayed advent of modernity to Ireland affected those who were priests, and those who were training to become priests. The turmoil in the national seminary in Maynooth in the period pre- and post-1979 is a useful indicator of how things were evolving. In his 1986 novella, *The Seminary*, Michael Harding gives us an insider’s view of the confusion that beset many young male seminarians at this time. The eighty year-old fictional spiritual director, Father George Skewer, who had spent the majority of his life in Maynooth, notes:

If he met a seminarian at the gate, wearing a red shirt and denim jeans, or chatting intently to a young first-arts girl, he looked the other way and preferred to remember what seminarians used to look like: lonesome figures, tortured faces, untypical of youth; all individuality submerged under the long dress-like black cassock. In his view, as it was and should be in the making days of a priest. (Harding 1986, 36)

If we are to believe the report of the apostolic visitation set up in the wake of the Murphy Report by Pope Benedict, Father Skewer’s view of what constitutes a proper seminary training is the correct one. In 2012, one of the findings of the visitation team was that the formal segregation of seminarians from lay students was to be reinstated in Maynooth. The underlying premise of this action is that somehow interaction with those not studying for the priesthood (particularly women) might prove distracting in relation to the life of prayer and reflection that should characterise life in a seminary. But one wonders what is to happen to newly ordained priests when they go to work in parishes, where the majority of those attending religious ceremonies will be women? Will donning the once more fashionable clerical

garb somehow insulate them from temptation? Will their hypothetical consideration of the potential dangers posed by concupiscence in the seminary assist them in their future careers? Also, will spending time in all all-male environment help those of a homosexual orientation to live fulfilled celibate lives? The final year student, Peter Maguire, in Harding's story, describes the special treatment he receives when home on holidays from Maynooth:

He assisted on the altar in his parish that Easter, and wore his black suit and collar everywhere. People would approach him at the church gate and shake his hand. At home his mother began fussing over him and telling his sisters to move from the chair and let him watch what he wanted on the television... And he felt good at last that something had come of his six years and his mother's prayers. (Harding 1986, 78)

Peter perseveres, although it is clear that he has at best a sceptical view of religion and regularly doubts his suitability for the priesthood. His friend Mel Kavanagh falls by the wayside, however, because of an inability to accept the arid spiritual example that he sees ingrained in someone like Peter. The latter has nothing but disdain for his fellow seminarians, seeing them as misguided and inept. In an uncharacteristic outburst, Kavanagh exclaims:

'Y'see, most guys in here, I believe, are maligned, and if the truth were known, have a lot going for them. Because they have one thing you don't have, and it's called faith. That's your problem Peter ... you have no faith ... in God ... or people ... it makes no difference ... it's all the one. And true, I kept very quiet about it. I keep very quiet about a lot of things ... so that bastards like you won't be going around ... pontificating about it'. (Harding 1986, 86)

As a former priest, Harding presents a damning critique of the type of life lived by many who did their training in the national seminary of Ireland in the 1970s and 80s, some of whom are now relatively senior clerics. Pope John Paul was visibly displeased when he visited the beautiful Gunn Chapel in Maynooth and was greeted with the triumphalist chant: 'He's got the whole world/In his hands, he's got the whole world.' The Pontiff's reaction on television showed that he felt this type of welcome to his arrival was better suited to a pop concert than to the hallowed surrounds of the chapel. Writing about sexual abuse and the Catholic Church, psychotherapist Marie Keenan imputes many of

the problems to a failure among the hierarchy to see the extent to which the actions of a minority were possible because the majority were blind to what exactly lay at the root of the issue:

The mind-set of the hierarchy was, and to some extent still is, that this was a problem of flawed individuals, rather than a problem that has significant organisational causative dimensions that became systematically embedded in Church thinking and practice (Keenan 2014, 99).

Writing in the same collection, sociologist Tom Inglis argues that control of people's bodies allowed the Church to wield unbridled power in Ireland. Inglis contrasts the submissiveness of Irish people in the sexual realm to the delayed arrival of modernity to the Emerald Isle:

It was through the regulations of bodies and strategies of sexualisation and self-monitoring and regulation that the modern self emerged. The modern self is constituted within the move away from punitive regimes to systems and strategies of critical self-awareness. The self emerges through individual moral responsibility. It may well be, then, that if there is a cultural difference about the Irish, it lies in the way this process took place in Ireland and how the Catholic Church developed a monopoly not just over schooling and the discipline of punishment of bodies, but over the discourse and practice of sexualising bodies (Inglis 2014, 89).

Sexuality was always a taboo subject in Ireland, but it is noticeable how much this has changed with the waning influence of the Catholic Church in recent decades. Being Catholic no longer means following the dictates of an institution to the letter of the law and a new brand of à la carte Catholic is clearly discernible in the markedly more liberal approach to sexual mores in the Ireland of the third millennium.

Undoubtedly the decades we have chosen to cover in this book were significant ones in the 'undoing' (to use Fuller's phrase) of the dominant Catholic culture in Ireland. From Pope Paul's visit to the publication of four damning reports in relation to callous mistreatment of young people in Industrial Schools and Magdalene Laundries, the reputational damage to the Church was huge, but it is possibly true to say that even without the revelations that came to light in the 1990s and 2000s, the dye was cast in terms of people's move away from organised religion. The title of the journalist Mary Kenny's 1997 book, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, shows an awareness that Catholicism as she knew

it during her youth, was gone, a disappearance that was no cause for rejoicing in her view. She refused to succumb to total pessimism, however, as she wrote towards the end of her study:

Catholicism in Ireland, as it was, is dead, but of course a spirituality remains, as indeed it does for all Celtic peoples: the annual pilgrimages, the visitations to holy places, and the funeral rites according to Mother Church remain. One seldom sees anyone saying the Angelus now – the Angelus bell is still rung on national radio and television, though its days are numbered, being widely criticized as ‘sectarian’ – or blessing themselves while passing a church, but there are snatches of Catholic Ireland in daily life. (Kenny 1997, 392-393)

What Kenny is saying really is that there has been a serious decline in traditional Catholic culture in Ireland, a lost legacy the consequences of which we seek to explore in this book. There have been a number of books that cover the various scandals of the past few decades and their impact on, the allegiance to, and trust in organised religion in Ireland. The purpose of *From Galway to Cloyne* is to employ a multidisciplinary approach in an attempt to bring to light how and why this process took place and the consequences, it has had for Irish society. Vincent Twomey, Professor emeritus of Moral Theology in St Patrick’s College Maynooth, in *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, offered some excellent explanations about how Ireland’s fragile Catholic identity found it impossible to deal with the combination of increasing secularism and the clerical abuse scandals because of its lack of an intellectual tradition that encouraged free and open debate about theological and philosophical issues, as happens in a country like France, for example. Twomey observes:

The lack of a rich tradition of systematic (self)-questioning and searching, which is what theological scholarship is, coupled with the way whatever little writing on the subject to appear in Ireland has been effectively ignored, may well be the price we are paying for the assumption that, since we were a chosen nation, we would never lose the faith; we did not have to think things through. (Twomey 2003, 40)

The chapters that follow are a way of ‘thinking things through’, of assessing how we have come to the present impasse and what approach Irish society might adopt as it seeks to come to terms with what is effective a post-Catholic culture. Our main objective is to map how the early monolithic connection of Irishness and Catholicism evolved into the more pluralistic public sphere in which we now live. In

doing this, we want to avoid the trap into which many commentators fall by adopting a stance that is pro- or anti-Catholicism. In tracing the important cultural legacy that is Irish Catholicism, we have assembled a multidisciplinary group of authors who are all experts in their field and who provide intriguing lenses through which to explore the phenomenon.

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