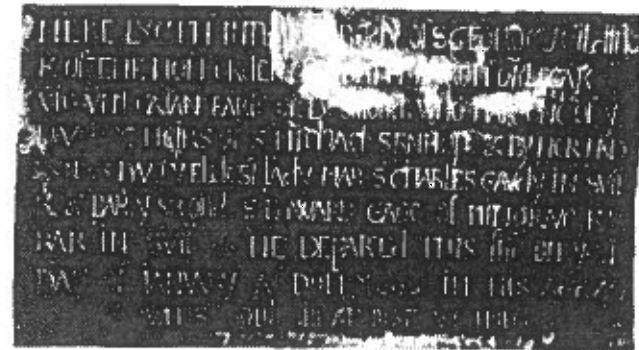


CUMANN SEANDÁLAÍOCHTA
IS STAIRE CHIARRAÍ

JOURNAL

OF THE

KERRY ARCHAEOLOGICAL
AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



No. 29

ISSUED FREE TO MEMBERS FOR 1996

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the landowners who allowed me access to their lands in order that I might inspect the sites recorded here. I wish to thank also all those who provided me with local information, especially Mr. Michael Culloty of Toornanoulagh, Currow, Killarney, and Dr. Daphne Pochin Mould of Aherla, Co. Cork. I am grateful to the Trustees of Muckross House, Killarney, The Head of the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin, The Director of the National Library of Ireland, Kildare St., Dublin and the Director of Operations, Ordnance Survey, Phoenix Park, Dublin, for allowing me permission to quote from the unpublished material in their collections.

A Post-Mortem on the Protestant Crusade in Dingle

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Religious Conflict in Dingle

What I would like to do in this paper is to look back at the religious war that caused such turmoil in the parishes of Dingle and Ballyferriter 150 years ago. Since, however, history is never confined to the past but also shapes the present in many ways, it is important to see what lessons should be learned from this conflict. While times have changed and there is no danger today that such a conflict will ever again occur, human nature is still the same. Unless we learn from history, we will keep repeating its mistakes.

The parishes of Dingle and Ballyferriter were in the grip of the famine at that time and devastation was widespread. By July 1847 a quarter of the population had already died of hunger and disease. While this attracted national attention, the religious conflict was given even greater attention. In July 1844 the British Government had planned to send warships and a military force to Morocco to maintain peace there. However, at the last moment these plans were changed—instead of sailing to Morocco, they were diverted to Dingle. Two warships, the *Stromboli* and the *Lynx*, with 200 soldiers aboard, arrived in Dingle that month. The coastguards from the stations all around were brought into town to help them. They took over Dingle that Sunday morning, 21st. July 1844. Great trouble was expected in the town. Only a month before that, Denis Leyne Brasbie, a Catholic curate, had been transferred from the Parish of Boherbue to the Parish of Ballyferriter (or the parish of "Kilmalkedar" as it was then called). In the letter that Bishop Cornelius Egan wrote to him on the 30th. May, informing him of the transfer, he told him that he hoped that the sea air would be good for him and reminded him of the need "to check the current of proselytism" in the parish. The bishop added: "Indeed, I may say it is now pretty well checked in that parish; still the fire must be kept up." Little did the bishop think, when he wrote that letter, that within a month of reaching the parish, Fr. Brasbie himself would become a Protestant.

It was a devastating blow to the Catholics generally and especially to Fr. Casey, Parish Priest of Ballyferriter—his parish clerk had also defected. Parson Gayer of Dingle planned to make the most of it. It was arranged that Brasbie would solemnly renounce the Pope and Popedom

at a public ceremony at the Protestant Church on Sunday 21st. July. The event was given maximum publicity beforehand. In a letter that Brashie had written to the papers a few days before that, he identified the Catholic Church as the hideous monster of the Apocalypse and said that the Catholic priests in their campaign against the converts were only doing what the Jewish priests did against Our Lord. Naturally, feelings were running high and some 7000 people had gathered in Dingle that day—many of them in a very angry mood. Great trouble was expected. However, thanks to the fact that the soldiers had already taken over the town that morning, with drums and colours and "armed to the teeth", the event passed off without bloodshed.

The Protestant campaign really started in Dingle in 1833 when the Rev. Charles Gayer came as private chaplain to Lord Ventry—he was also appointed as assistant curate to Parson Goodman in Dingle. Before that there had never been any religious conflict there. Thomas Chute Goodman had been Parson in Dingle from 1824 and his father, John, had been Parson there from 1780. The Protestant congregation was small, normally about 30. Instead of congregating at the Protestant Church, they often met in a room in the town. Thomas Chute Goodman confined his ministry to the small local Protestant community. The Goodmans lived in Ballymore (or Baile Áimín Treanntach) about three miles west of Dingle. Even though there was a big class division between them and their Catholic neighbours, still they shared the same culture—Séamus, son of Thomas Chute Goodman loved Irish music and Irish songs. Although Parson Goodman was on the committee of the Dingle and Ventry Mission Association, he never involved himself in the proselytising campaign nor was there ever any hostility against the Goodman family. In this respect he was very different from Charles Gayer. This is evident in an anonymous death-threat sent to Lord Ventry on 24th. Dec. 1844:

TAKE NOTIS

That if you do not send Gayer the bastard out of this country, from a quiet and pesible people, and discountenance all blagards that deny their holy religion for soup: this do, and you will do right. By the Eternal God i will drive a brace of balls through your carcass privately, otherwise in the noon-day if not.

Signed by

A RIGHT GOOD AIM.

Tipprey +
for ever

Parson Goodman is a good man,
he interfares with no man's religion.

I lave him to you.¹

It was with the coming of Charles Gayer that the Protestant campaign really began. He was a young man in his 20s at that time, the son of an army officer from Somerset. He represented a new crusading spirit that was then gathering force among Protestants. Lady Ventry was a Blake from Galway and, although the child of a mixed marriage, she was a staunch or "black" Protestant who used her influence to support the Protestant crusade. In this she was fully supported by David Peter Thompson, agent for Lord Ventry. Thompson had full reins of power in Lord Ventry's estate—he had been appointed receiver by the Court of Chancery in 1827 when the 2nd Baron Ventry died because the estate was bankrupt. Thompson was also a staunch Protestant. It is said that the first Lord Ventry, grandfather of the then peer, had tried to boost his position by producing a rent-roll which was nominal to a great degree. He set the land at a very high price but he only demanded what amounted to a fair rent—the balance was never demanded. Thompson is said to have used this as leverage to forward the Protestant cause. If the tenants were willing to become Protestant, the full rent would not be demanded of them. All these factors contributed to the success of the Protestant mission. From the time that Gayer arrived in Dingle, the number of converts increased significantly. Already three additions had to be made to the Protestant Church in Dingle to accommodate the new converts. Protestant Churches had been built in Ventry and Ba'lyferrier where there had never been any Protestant Church before. Many Protestant schools had been opened in Dingle and west of Dingle—even on the Blasket Island. As Charles Gayer saw the future that day, the edifice of Popery was tumbling down. He said in 1844:

I am fully persuaded that if the people of God furnished us the means, Popery would be shaken here to its very foundation; but now is the time for exertion, while the minds of the people are so unsettled.

The report of the *Dingle and Ventry Mission Association* for 1848 shows the same belief that victory was at hand. Referring to the 1848 attempt at rebellion, it says:

The feeble attempt to excite rebellion last autumn has also unmasked the priesthood; they are looked on as the *authors and extinguishers* of that foolish insurrection. The fall and flight of the hireling shepherd has also awakened enquiry; and though fierce and formidable agencies are still combined to check and impede the onward progress of the truth, 'tis vain to fight against God; Antichrist is not mightier than Christ; the tide has set in

against Popery; Heaven and earth are weary of her abominations; even now her arm is palsied; the children are ashamed of the superstitious practices of their fathers; the grass grows green on the station path; penance is losing its power—the pilgrimage its virtue; and the cool contempt with which the once-venerated scapulars are cast away and trampled underfoot, shows that whatever exertions are resorted to restore and support the Popedom, the real power and influence of Popery are gone.

The great advances that the Protestant crusade had already made seemed to support this prediction of the fall of Popedom. *Ach, ní mar siltear, bítear.* These years, in fact, marked the high-tide in that Protestant crusade and the ebb was about to set in. A new life and spirit came into the Catholic Church. The Vincentian Mission of 1846 initiated this new spirit. The Irish Christian Brothers established a monastery and school in Dingle—the Presentation Sisters already had their school in the town. The Famine was such a calamity that it stifled everything. Perhaps the biggest calamity suffered by the Protestant crusade was the death of Charles Gayer himself of typhoid in Jan. 1848—he was only 42.

Gayer was the chief crusader. After his death, the considerable financial support that came from Britain began to dwindle. During the 1830's and 1840's there was a growing belief in British circles that the native Irish were about to adopt the Protestant faith. At long last they would become loyal citizens of the crown. However, this dream began to fade during the Famine years and also because of the attempted uprising of 1848. As well as this, other events began to draw the attention of British people away from Ireland, especially the events leading up to the Crimean War in 1854. The dwindling of British support began to affect the Protestant crusade everywhere in Ireland. By 1854 the houses in the Protestant Colony in Ventry were being advertised for leasing. Protestant schools were being closed. The report of the *Dingle and Ventry Mission* for 1855 saw Ireland as "reverting to the obscurity of the dark ages".

The National Background to the Protestant Crusade

The background to the Protestant Crusade has been well researched and outlined by Desmond Bowen in two books: *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800-70* (Gill and Macmillan 1978) and *Souperism: Myth or Reality?* (The Mercier Press 1970). The Pope was generally seen in Britain as the great enemy of everything British. Being the only country in Europe where Protestantism had completely established itself, there was a constant fear of the machinations of Rome. The identification of

the Pope as "Anti-Christ" or as the "the Great Whore of Babylon" was almost an article of faith in the Protestant Church in the 17th., 18th. and 19th. centuries. Even a Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury had picked this as his thesis when he was a student—to prove that the Antichrist spoken of in the Apocalypse was the Pope.² Papaphobia was widespread in Britain. The burning of figures of the Pope was a regular ritual in parades. Small things could sometimes give rise to anti-Papist hysteria such as that seen in the Gordon Riots in 1780. Even though this fear had somewhat subsided by 1800—Britain by then had acquired a huge empire—the fear was still there under the surface. There was still a xenophobic kind of nationalism, a garrison mentality. With Catholic Emancipation and the success of O'Connell's campaign and the Tithe War of the 1830's, the old fears came to the surface once more. These fears were further fed by the heavy emigration of Irish people to Britain, especially with the Famine—some 1,500,000 are said to have settled in England by 1851. There were big Irish ghettos in most cities. The re-establishment of the English hierarchy by Pius IX in Oct. 1850 added more fuel—not to mention the famous triumphalist pastoral of Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman: "From out the Flaminian Gate". Wiseman had been reared in Co. Waterford.

This was the background of a new anti-Papist movement in Britain when the forces of both Church and State were united in a new anti-Pope crusade. Exeter Hall in the Strand in London became the headquarter of this movement—the Vatican of English Evangelicalism. It was entirely opposed to any concessions being made to the Catholic Church. There was very bitter opposition, for example, to a government grant to Maynooth College. One M.P. (J.P. Plumptre) said in 1845: "To endow Popery once more in a land that has been rescued from its yoke is madness, little short of high treason against heaven".³ Today, we would tend to attribute such language to a small, narrow-minded sect. However, at that time this attitude reflected mainstream thinking in British society. There was a strong Tory element in England willing to support this Protestant crusade in Ireland, believing that the peace of the realm depended on its success. The same crusading spirit was evident in several other areas in the poorer parts of Ireland, often supported by the local Protestant gentry and by Protestant bishops—e.g. the campaign of Edward Nangle in Achill, of Rev. Alexander Dallas in Connemara, and of Rev. William Fisher in Kilmoe in West Cork.

The Bible

The Bible was at the heart of the Protestant crusade—it was a basic tenet of the Protestant Reformation that the Bible was the only source of

divine relation. They firmly believed that if the Irish people were given access to the Bible, it would make them loyal and independent, thrifty and industrious. There would be no more rebellions and it would rid the country once and for all of the superstition and idolatry of Romanism. They believed that the Pope and the priests were doing their best to keep the Bible out of Ireland, knowing that if people knew the Bible, they could no longer hold them in slavery to themselves.

We find this belief expressed in a long poem by Séamus Goodman, Agallamh Bhriain agus Airt (never published)—he was a Protestant minister in West Cork and later Professor of Irish in Trinity. He speaks of a "spéirbhean" that was seen weeping on the side of Sliabh Luachra. However, this *spéirbhean* was not Banba or Fodhla weeping for the bondage in which Ireland was held under British rule. The *spéirbhean* in this case was found to be the Bible. She was weeping because the priests had banished her from Ireland. Her message was that, instead of people putting their trust in the Mass and the saints and in the teaching of false priests, they should turn to Christ:

Sgread go minic air, gairm is glaoidh air,
is faigh dod chlann an Bíobla Gaeilge;
ná seasaimh níos sia ar shagairt an éithigh
do mheallann in bbur ndromaibh go hifreann daor sibh.

In Goodman's poem the person who discovered that the *spéirbhean* was the Bible was the poet, Séamus Bán (Ó Conchúir) in Dunquin. He was one of the first converts and it was Thomas Chute Goodman who had given him a copy of the Bible. It is not clear from this poem to what extent Séamus Goodman himself would subscribe to the extreme views and severe judgment on priests expressed in it—the poem is presented as a conversation between Brian and Airt, Brian representing the Catholics and Airt the Protestants.

Bible Readers were an integral part of the Protestant crusade. They carried their Bible around with them and wherever they could get people to listen, they would start reading it. They believed that it had mysterious power. James Jordan was the Bible Reader on the Blasket Islands. He kept a diary which he sent to Mrs. D.P. Thompson and which gives us some interesting insights into Blasket life during the famine years. For example: "November 4th, (1846)—Visited a house, found the children crying. They had had nothing to eat that day. I could not read for their poor Mother, for she was too much fretted, and I felt too much for her. My honoured and Christian friend, that the state of this island is most deplorable." It is a great tribute to James Jordan that he reached out to help everyone, irrespective of religion, when the crisis came.

Sometimes to get an audience to listen to his Bible reading, he would give those who came to his house a mouthful of tobacco to chew or a clay pipe. He used carry the Bible with him wherever he went, down to the strand or to a rambling house at night. Some houses told him that he would be welcome provided he left his Bible at home.

Unfortunately, these evangelicals tended to have a tunnel vision in their use of the Bible—they concentrated on those texts which were seen as condemning Popery. Take for example an account by a Protestant minister, Daniel Foley, who accompanied Parson Moriarty to the Protestant school on the Blaskets in 1848—it was the only school on the island and about half the pupils were Catholics. When they reached the island, they first assembled for prayer at the new pier. While praying there, they happened to see "two of her Majesty's ships of war rapidly moving through the foaming Blasket Sound". They waved to the officers on board who waved back and all the converts sang with their minister: "God save the Queen" and they prayed "in harmonious accents that God would confound the politics, and frustrate the knavish tricks of her enemies." At the school, they found that "secular knowledge" was making "slow process" because the children were so limited in their experience of normal surroundings. They thought, for example, that a neck-tie was a towel and they didn't even know what a bridge was because they had never seen it on the island. The account continues:

But when we came to examine them in the Scriptures, they were able to answer everything, in an anti-Roman way too. "Repeat the second commandment?" was a question put to an intelligent boy of Romish parents. He answered: "Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image," &c "There is Romanism expelled from you" exclaimed Mr. Moriarty to me in great delight. "Yes, sir," added one of the converts, "and that is a Roman boy, too."

Priests, Part of the Army of Anti-Christ

The Protestant crusaders were particularly attracted to *The Book of Revelations* or *The Apocalypse* where they identified Anti-Christ with the Pope. Along with the Pope, they also demonised the priests because they saw them as the minions of the Pope. Priests were generally presented as unscrupulous, greedy and rebellious. They give many anecdotes about priests—some of them very colourful. Take for example the sermon preached by the Parish Priest in Castlegregory on the Sunday before Shrove Tuesday 1846—people were probably a bit slow getting married and as a result his income was down. He said:

*Bad luck to the boys of the parish for a set of poltroons; They have no heart to the girls, at all at all. Marry, I tell you, marry, and bad luck to you if you don't. Look at me, I am without a hat to my head, and without a coat to my back, and my horse is a shew under my saddle. Marry, ye raskals or I'll put my hunger and thirst on you, I'll curse your crops and ruin you entirely.*⁵

Another incident recorded in Oct. 1846 by "M. B."—probably Maurice O'Brien, the Scripture Reader — gives a conversation he had with an old woman called "Norry" in Ballyferriter:

'You have a comfortable house, Norry;' 'Indeed I have not, Mr. --' said she, 'and I must leave it entirely.' 'Why?' I asked. 'Oh! the rats,' said she, 'they will eat me at night, they come into the bed to me.' 'Very bad companions,' I observed, 'and what do you purpose doing?' 'I went to Father Pat,' said she, 'to drive them away with a mass, and he promised to come; but he is going to charge five shillings.' 'And is a mass good for driving rats away?' said I. 'Arrah, then you know it is good for everything in the world,' says she. There was no use saying much to her, but I was very amused by the conclusiveness of her logic.⁶

Fr. Pat is probably Fr. Pat Foley. It is probably the same Fr. Foley who is also mentioned in another book. He told the people in Dunquin that it was far better to steal than to take the soup. They took him at his word and they stole the pot in which he himself had prepared his dinner. The following Sunday he addressed them as follows:

You thieving shameless cormorants! When you went to commit such a shameless robbery, you might have been content with the pot, but to go and steal my dinner, to leave your priest without a bit of meat, is an offence of the blackest die, and upon my conscience, I do not believe that Parson Gayer and his turn-coats, bad and all as they are, would have committed a crime of such enormity.⁷

Many of these reports were probably written for people who had never met Catholics and who had been conditioned to see Papists and Romish priests as sinister people. Most of the funds that supported the Protestant crusade came from England where religious dialogue was unthinkable. These accounts confirmed them in their views. However, the same mentality was widespread in Ireland at the time. In case anyone might argue that there were also Romish priests who were peace-loving and

honest people, Parson Gayer said that the Popish Church was the pagan God, Proteus, in ancient Greece—one moment he might appear peaceful and harmless but the next moment he could take the form of a monster.

Catholic Practices

Almost all Catholic practices were branded as idolatrous, especially the Mass which is frequently ridiculed. The most extreme language was used for it, e.g. "blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits", "one of the grossest pieces of imposition which Satan himself could devise".⁸ The converts were encouraged to show their revulsion of these practices. Maurice O'Brien, a Scripture Reader, accosted Fr. Mangan at a Station Mass and called him an idolator and referred to the Blessed Sacrament as "the pasty idol". The priest's clerk punched him and he brought a court case against him. When the judge told him that his language was inappropriate, he answered: "the Queen has sworn it, and British law proclaims it."⁹ The wearing of scapulars was another Papist practice that was rejected with horror. It was a regular occurrence that one who was about to become a convert would publicly tear off a scapular, fling it on the ground and trample on it. Devotions to Mary and to the Saints were rejected and any reports of miracles dismissed as false. Doing the rounds at Holy Wells was absolutely rejected—converts removed from their land all stones where there had been traditional pilgrimages.

Millenarianism

Another feature of this Protestant Evangelicalism was a certain brand of millenarianism. They took literally the words of Revelations, chapter 13—before the end of the world, Christ was going to come again and reign for a 1000 years. Under his leadership, Anti-Christ was going to be destroyed. This speculation was gaining ground from the beginning of the 19th. century and even a millenarian paper, the *Christian Herald*, began to be issued in Limerick in 1830.¹⁰ Protestant Evangelicals believed that they already saw the signs that Christ was about to appear. With the decline of the Papal States, the end of papal power was in sight and this would be the prelude to the apocalyptic events predicted in *The Book of Revelations*. This expectation strengthened the determination of these Protestant crusaders. They wanted to be a part of the final battle against Antichrist. "Coming out of Babylon" was a phrase often used for conversions. They couldn't get at the Pope directly but they could do the next best thing in destroying his power in Ireland.

J. Jordan was the Bible Reader working for Gayer on the Blasket—he was a native Irish speaker from Co. Tipperary. In his diary for 1844 he writes:

This morning before breakfast, a number of Romanists came into my house, and one of them, after a long conversation said that he would wish to know if what he heard about the second coming was true, or would Christ come before the day of judgment? I told him that it was true and I read Rev. xx for them; when I read the fifth verse, *he repeated back again and again with astonishment; and also the sixth verse, as did all of them.*¹¹

The British Empire was seen as God's instrument for establishing this millennium on earth. In the 1848 report of the Dingle and Ventry Mission Association we read:

The zeal manifested by England for the extention of the Redeemer's kingdom; the success granted to her arms by the God of Battles; the unbroken peace she enjoys at home, while a moral earthquake is shaking the thrones and kingdoms of Europe; upborne like the ark of old upon the face of the troubled waters, because she keeps and carries within her the truth of God as a sacred deposit—all these tokens of divine favour seem a prophetic earnest that she is destined to become an honoured instrument in hastening "that happy day, when the sons of Adam shall be set free," and when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.¹²

Séamus Goodman expresses the same view in his poem *Agallamh Bhriain agus Airt*. The poem finishes with the return of a golden age to Ireland:

Beidh síocháin ghrámbar againn le chéile;
beidh againn cuigeann is cruach is maothal;
an Bíobla naofa líofa dá léamh linn,
fairsinge flúirse is beannacht Dé againn.

He adds, however, that before this happens, the Pope, or "an chailig ghrána" as he calls him, would have to be banished from Ireland. The priests will eventually come over of their own accord when they see the people abandoning them. They will marry and be like everyone else and if they don't marry, they will be sent out to the Skelligs; "mar a bpósfaidh gach aon mhaic sgíge díobh, cuirfidimid siar go Sgeilg Mhichíl iad".

Irish Culture

Even though William Beddell, Protestant Bishop of Kilmore had already translated the Bible into Irish in the 17th. century, there was a general antipathy towards Irish language and culture in the Protestant establishment. No wonder the Protestant Church was seen as "An Teampall Gallda" by the native Irish. It was not until the 19th. century that things began to change. The Irish Society and the Scripture Readers' Society were founded in 1818 and 1822 to bring the Bible to Irish-speaking people. A new missionary spirit began to appear which was closely related to Protestant Evangelicalism in England. For the first time Protestant clergymen saw it as their mission to convert the native Irish. They could only do this through the medium of Irish and it was this need rather than any love of Irish culture in itself that was the driving force in their mission. The first of 19 rules drafted by the Irish Society in 1818 said that "the exclusive object of the Society" was to instruct the native Irish how to get an accurate knowledge of English and that the Irish Bible and Irish Prayer Book were being distributed among them "for their moral amelioration". They disclaimed any intention "of making the Irish language a vehicle for the communication of general knowledge". Parson Moriarty was hurt by this lack of love for Irish culture for its own sake. Séamus Goodman also had a genuine love for Irish culture but they were very much the exceptions.

Lessons from the Bible Crusade

In the midst of conflict, arguments and shibboleths take over and dialogue disappears. Because of this, it is hard to be objective. However, in the ecumenical climate in which we live today, it is possible to be more objective about our past. It is still more important to learn the lessons from it for the future.

However this conflict is assessed, I don't think one would be justified in villifying Charles Gayer or Parson Moriarty. Charles Gayer displayed some heroic qualities, however misled he may have been in his religious views. He believed he was fighting a crusade against "Popedom" and he said he was prepared to die in that crusade. He also did Trojan work to relieve people during the Famine. It was Gayer who built the Beacon Tower at the entrance to Dingle Harbour—to prevent ships from missing the entrance to the harbour and being shipwrecked on Inch Strand. That tower was built in 1847 when the Famine was raging and people were desperately seeking to earn some money that would save them from starvation and death. All public works had been halted. In a letter that Gayer wrote at the time, it is obvious that he was going through some intense anguish when he saw the condition of the

people—he said that the people had no other choice but to lie down and die. He said: "There is no district I am sure in Ireland, anything like this. I am giving food to at least three thousand people daily."¹³ It was as a result of his work that he caught typhoid fever himself and died on Jan. 20, 1848 at the age of 42 leaving a large family—as orphans because his wife had died before that. Despite all the bitterness that had preceded, a large crowd of Catholics attended his funeral and this is a great tribute to his charity. Parson Thomas Moriarty also gave great help during the Famine. Thanks to him, no one died of hunger on the Blasket Island even though whole villages were wiped out on the mainland opposite. When the real crisis came, Parson Moriarty helped everyone on the Blasket irrespective of their religion.

The Results of State Establishment

The fact that the Protestant Church was a state-established Church was a crucial factor in this conflict. Wherever a Christian Church is established by a state, it inevitably absorbs the behaviour and mores of the state. This is like a kiss of death for any Christian Church. If Christianity is to be true to itself, it must be prophetic; it must become a counter-culture. Wherever it is established, whether officially or unofficially, it inevitably loses all prophetic witness. The conscience of the Church becomes that of the state. This is very evident in the Protestant campaign in Dingle. David Peter Thompson was seen as one of its heroes despite the wholesale evictions for which he was responsible. In Aug. 1840, for example, he evicted 14 families in Ventry—they included 65 children. Shortly afterwards he evicted another 47 families consisting of 233 individuals, and another 247 in Lispolé in Sept. 1840. Yet, he was hailed as a hero by Parson Moriarty when he died in mysterious circumstances on his way to Dublin at the end of 1844. Similarly, Brasbie after his conversion to Protestant attacked Archbishop McHale for his criticism of landlords who were evicting tenants—he said that they were doing nothing wrong, they were only doing what the law allowed.

Accommodation to the state appears in many different aspects of this campaign. In the education system set up by these Protestant evangelicals, there seems to have been class discrimination. In 1846 an American Lady, Mrs. A. Nicholson, gave the following account of the Protestant School in Ventry:

We visited the Protestant school and found a young lady teaching a class of promising young misses, but when we inquired if they studied Geography, as we saw maps hanging on the lower end of

the room, she replied:

'The maps are for the boys; these are the daughters of the lower orders and we do not advance them.'

'But have they not talents to be cultivated and is this not a professedly religious school instituted by Missionaries?'

'It is,' she replied, 'but I must do as I am bidden. They are poor and they must be educated according to their station.'¹⁴

She next visited a school in Dingle taught by nuns and found everything taught there, even needlework. The nuns told her that the Protestants teach only Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.

Racism is another factor that goes with state establishment. It is deeply entrenched in the human psyche and must always be rejected by Christianity. Antipathy to other cultures is almost inevitable when the Church identifies itself with a certain culture—the inculturation so often seen in the history of the Catholic Church becomes impossible. We see this in the general antipathy of Protestant evangelicals to other cultures—they were seen as foreign. I think we can learn a lesson from our Celtic tradition in this regard. The word "dthreabhach" or "hermit" meant "untribing" oneself. By separating themselves from their own people, the early Irish monks became prophetic witnesses. No one was a foreigner in their eyes. On the continent, they were not afraid to speak out against princes when this was needed. St. Patrick himself had already set a great example by condemning Coroticus in such strong terms.

The principle adapted by many states at the time of the Reformation was that they would decide the religion of the people—*cuius regio, eius religio*. This principle is still widespread in today's world and shows itself in many subtle ways. Even if there is no discrimination or persecution of other religions, the very fact that one church is state-established affects people's thinking. The fact, for example, that the British monarchy must be Protestant and that the Anglican Church is state-established has helped to entrench positions in Northern Ireland.

Conscience and the Soup

The setting up of colonies was an integral part of the Protestant crusade. It is easy to understand why Gayer felt the need for this. The lives of people were so intertwined and "popish superstition" so widespread, as he saw it, that the only hope of saving the converts from this contamination was to isolate them. In this way they were able to keep out the priest and other family members who might seek to win them back. This often occurred when a convert was dying and it led to

a lot of bitterness and distress.¹⁵ It is significant that another Protestant leader, Monk Mason, attacked the whole idea of setting up colonies for converts. He said that "persecution was the truest test of sincerity".¹⁶ Unless a convert was willing to suffer for his faith, he was not a sincere convert. This is borne out again and again by the stories of the "converts" themselves. In a case for libel, for example, that Gayer brought against the *Kerry Examiner* in March 1845, one of the witnesses presented by the paper was John Power—he was a fish-jolter who lived in Holy Stone. He said that he became a convert when Gayer give him a cart but had come back to the Catholic faith. Cross-examined by Mr. Bennett in court, he admitted to having been often drunk:

Mr. Bennett: Come now, my man, by virtue of your oath, what induced you to go back to Mass?

Witness: What would make me go back but the love of God.

Mr. Bennett: And what induced you to go to Church? (i.e. "Teampall" or Protestant Church).

Witness: 'Twas my belly of course, what else (roars of laughter)? Faith I used never get the belly-ache while I was in the Church.

Mr. Bennett: Did you eat meat on a Friday while you were going to Church?

Witness: No indeed, faith, I did not. I would not eat meat for them on a Friday, anyday, nor I would not eat meat today either (laughter).¹⁷

Another example of this is the case of Mary Breen. Because of her poverty she and her children had to go into the poorhouse in Dingle. The usual practice on such occasions was that the mother and children would be separated from each other. The children would be sent to another poorhouse in Liscarney in Cloghane. This poorhouse had such a bad reputation that it was locally known as "Botany Bay". However, if the mother became a Protestant, she could keep her children with her—the reason being that there was no Protestant Church in Cloghane. Mary Breen, like other mothers with this dilemma, decided to become a Protestant in order to keep her children with her. Her eldest son, however, refused to become a Protestant and he was sent down to Liscarney. Parson Lewis who succeeded Parson Gayer sent for him a few times but he refused to come. In an official investigation into the situation, Mary Breen said that she remained a Catholic at heart and she describes how the Protestant service used to hurt her:

When they used to be running down the Blessed Virgin Mary,

that she had no power, and praising Queen Victoria in place of her, I used to tremble, and had a bit of bread, and knowing the bread before I'd be listening to them running down the religion I was born in.¹⁸

It was hunger and starvation that drove many people to join the Protestant Church at that time. One well-known verse is that of Micil a'Ghabhair who lived in a poor cabin in Dunquin. According to folklore, his hunger drove him to go to Parson Moriarty for help. The Parson asked him:

'A Mhicil a'Ghabhair, cad a thug tú an t-am seo eadartha?
'An bhliain a bheith gann is gur cuma teampall nó Aifreann.'
'An séanann tú teagasc na Róimhe, is gach uile nós a leanas é?'
'Is cuma cé'n teagasc a gheobhad, is í an mhin eorna a leanfadsa.'¹⁹

There can be no doubt that there were many "converts" like Micil a'Ghabhair who sold their conscience for soup. Such insincerity must have been obvious in many cases, especially among those facing starvation. James Jordon more or less admits this in his diary.²⁰

Just as it is immoral for anyone to act against one's conscience, it is equally wrong to pressurise people in any way to act against their conscience. This issue is as relevant now as it was then but today it often involves the state. A state should never seek to push its own agenda, where conscience is at issue. Civil issues regularly arise today which have deep moral implications for many citizens e.g. abortion, euthanasia, divorce, etc. A state that acknowledges the dignity of the human person must be aware of these and be prepared to consult its citizens. It should hold genuine referenda even when these may not be required by the law of the state. A failure to face up to moral issues inevitably invites a free-for-all situation and this inevitably produces a state which lacks any moral leadership. An amoral state tends to make sopers of its citizens—it will be like the Caesars of ancient Rome who sought to keep people happy with bread and circuses.

The Importance of Dialogue to avoid Conflict

It is revealing that Thomas Chute Goodman did not associate himself with the Protestant Crusade. Unlike Gayer, the Goodmans grew up in close contact with their Catholics neighbours. They knew the things that would antagonise them and they didn't want to force them. Séamus Goodman, for example, would have shared with Gayer the same extreme views about the Pope and priests and Catholic practice

generally. Unlike Gayer, however, he never forced his beliefs on Catholics in any way. In fact, Séamus Goodman was very popular with everyone—there is a big gate named in his honour in Skibbereen where he worked as a Parson. The very fact that he grew up knowing Catholics and in close contact with them made the big difference between himself and Gayer.

There is a lesson in this which is very relevant to our age. Irish history shows the many ways in which social divisions are fed by mistrust and suspicion, especially when some group feels that its identity is being threatened. A siege mentality can easily develop. Sometimes certain groups will seek to maintain these divisions for their own interests. If the state is seen to be any way a party to these divisions, the conflict is considerably deepened. It is crucial, therefore, that the state be able to rise above them, if it is to foster peace and dialogue between the parties. While the state cannot ever force people against their will to dialogue with each other, it can highlight the dangers for conflict inherent in certain situations. Since racism is a constant danger threatening society today, it may be helpful if governments appointed a Ministry for Peace with the task of diffusing such conflicts before they develop and alerting society to the dangers. What a pity if we never learn from our past mistakes!

A Spoonful of Honey

“A spoonful of honey attracts more flies than a barrelful of vinegar”—this axiom has been attributed to Francis de Sales. The Vincentian Mission in Dingle in 1846 introduced such a “spoonful of honey” when it was so much needed. For months before that mission, there was a campaign of complete boycott against Protestants in Dingle. No one was to sell to them or buy from them. Even when one of Gayer’s children wanted to buy bird-seed, he could not get it anywhere in Dingle once the word went round that it was he who wanted it! This boycott—or “exclusive dealing” as it was then called—was one of several weapons used against the converts. Fr. Halpin who was a curate in Dingle was constantly cursing them from the altar—people never forgot these curses and they are still remembered in folklore. The night he died, bonfires were lit in the Protestant colony in John Street and some Catholics were barely prevented from burning down the colony. Fr. John Sullivan was curate in Dingle when the souper-campaign started and he introduced the custom of solemnly excommunicating the soupers at Mass by bell, book and candle—in fact he is said to have coined the word “souper”. And yet all this campaign was counter-productive—it tended to create more bitter opposition. The Vincentian missionaries

brought in a new spirit of gentleness—instead of cursing and boycotting, they asked people to pray for those who had turned Protestant. They also introduced a great spirit of work—everyone wanted to help out and join parish societies. Even Parson Moriarty was impressed by the new spirit and felt that Protestants should learn from it.²¹

The spoonful of honey is the only cure for the bitterness that pervades our history. In the tragedies of Northern Ireland, the real heroes who will be remembered are the victims of the violence who have publicly forgiven the wrongs they have suffered and who campaign for peace.

The Bible, a Shared Heritage

Today the Bible is a shared heritage through which Christians of different Churches can share their reflections. At that time, however, the Catholic Church was seen by Protestants as being anti-Bible. There certainly was some basis for this. There was no Catholic devotion centred on the Bible at that time. When we look at the central position the Bible had in the early Celtic Church, we see the need for this. A homily in the *Leabhar Breac* states:

One of the noble gifts of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Scripture, by which all ignorance is enlightened, and all worldly sorrows comforted, by which all spiritual light is kindled, by which all weakness is made strong. The divine scripture is the mother and benign nurse of all the faithful who meditate and contemplate it, and are nourished by it, until they become chosen children of God by its advice.²²

Biblical devotion was strong in the early Celtic Church. There certainly was a need for Catholics to revive this devotion. However, the way in which it was used by these Protestant Evangelicals didn’t help towards this. While they used the Bible for prayer and reflection among themselves, especially when people were trying to cope with illness or death, they also used it as one of their main attacks on “Popedom” Still, even in these dismal times, we get a few glimpses of some Bible-sharing. James Gloster, the Scripture Reader in Dunquin, said that when he was still a Catholic, Fr. Casey gave him permission to buy a Douay Bible from the Protestant Pastor. He afterwards compared it with the Protestant Bible and found very little difference.²³ He said that he had never had any row with Fr. Casey. Another example is given by James Jordan, the Scripture Reader on the Blaskets. He was visiting a house

one night when one of the converts said that he was facing starvation—he had no more food left for himself or his family. Jordan read the passage from 3 Kings 17 describing how the prophet Elias was faced with starvation and God sent the raven to feed him. Then Elias came to Sarephtha in Sidon, where there was a widow who was herself facing starvation—she was reduced to one handful of flour and one cruet of oil. God told her not to be afraid, to take the oil and the flour to Elias. She did that and from that day forward her jar of flour and her cruet of oil were never empty. This story deeply moved one of the Catholics who was present:

“Then,” said one of the Roman Catholics, who were listening, ‘you shall have enough for this night without doubt—for I will give you a basket of Potatoes!’ and he was as good as his word, and sent him a plentiful basket, that surely kept him from want till assistance came to the island two days after from Mr. Gayer. Such is the blessed fruit of Bible-reading, it pours love into the heart even of a Romanist towards a Reformer.²⁴

William Bedell, Protestant Bishop of Kilmore in the 17th. century, was the first to translate the Bible into Irish and this was the version that was widely distributed by the Protestants in the Dingle Peninsula during this campaign. To have an Irish Bible in the house at that time was a sign that one was a Protestant—hence the name “Bíoblóir”. How times change! In 1850 the religious conflict was still very intense in Dingle. Fr. Owen O’Sullivan had been appointed Parish Priest of Dingle. He was a gifted person and was leading a very successful campaign against the Protestants. The Protestants approached a poor local woman, Neil Ní Shúilleabháin or “Neil na gCloch” who had a poetic gift and they tried to bribe her to write a satire on Fr. Owen. At that time, unlike the prosaic culture in which we live today, the poet was seen as a charismatic figure and the satire was a powerful weapon. Neil na gCloch, however, did not accept the bribe. Instead she sent them away “Téighidh abhaile is leigidh dom féinig” and she wrote her poem in praise of Fr. Owen. In her poem she referred to the Bible as “an Bíobla mallaithe tá ag mealladh gach aeinne”.²⁵ Her reference to the Bible as “an Bíobla mallaithe” reveals the mind of people at the time. However, after the Second Vatican Council authorised the vernacular liturgy, there was such a demand among Catholics for the same Bedell’s Bible, that it was soon out of print. The “Bíobla mallaithe” had become a “Bíobla beannaithe”.

It would be intriguing to know what would have been the reactions of Parsons Gayer, Moriarty and Goodman if they had been granted this

look into the future. Still more intriguing to know their reaction if they had been told that a priest, born in the same townland as Goodman, would produce a new translation of the Bible and would one day be the Popish Priest in Dingle. An Canónach Pádraig Ó Fiannachta merits to be called the successor of Bishop Bedell and his production of “An Bíobla Naofa” on CD-Rom is a truly historic event. It should help all of us to become true Bible Readers.

NOTES

- 1 *A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of the Change in Religious Opinion now taking place in Dingle and the West of the County of Kerry, Ireland*. (Mrs. D.P. Thompson) 2nd. ed. 1847, p. 187.
- 2 ‘No Popery: the mythology of a Protestant Nation’ in *The Tablet* (25 March 1995, pp. 384-386).
- 3 Bowen, D.: *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800-70*, p. 193.
- 4 Report of the Dingle and Ventry Mission Association for 1848 (p. 16).
- 5 *A Brief Account* etc. p. 62.
- 6 *A Brief Account* etc. p. 54-55.
- 7 *Inisfaul or the Irish Scripture Reader* (London 1841), p. 116-117. In an account given by Lady Chatterton who visited Ballyferriter at that time and who speaks highly of Fr. Casey, the parish Priest, she said that Fr. Foley looked so poor and badly dressed that she first thought he was one of the locals. cf. *Romantic Hidden Kerry* (Thomas F. O’Sullivan) p. 497-8.
- 8 *Kerry Evening Post*, March 18, 1848, p. 4.
- 9 *Kerry Evening Post*, Dec. 20, 1854, p. 3. col. 2.
- 10 Bowen, D.: *op. cit.*, p. 65. Millenarianism is based on a literal interpretation of Apoc. 19:11-21 and 20:1-6. The Catholic Church has rejected this literal interpretation and believes that the messianic hope can only be realized beyond history through the last judgement (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 676).
- 11 *A Brief Account* etc. (Mrs. D.P. Thompson) 2nd. ed. p. 97. These verses state that the faithful would arise and reign for a thousand years with Christ: “This is the first resurrection; the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over. Happy and blessed are those who share in the first resurrection; the second death cannot affect them but they will be priests of God and of Christ and reign with him for a thousand years.”
- 12 *A Brief Account* etc. pp. 201-202.
- 13 *Kerry Evening Post*, Wed. Sept. 8, 1847.
- 14 *Education and Souperism in Corca Duibhne* p. 23-4 (This is an M.A. Thesis by B.M. Kavanagh, B.A., H. Dip., Sept. 1937).
- 15 Denis Dunleavy, a fisherman, was one of the first converts in Ventry. He had survived a shipwreck only to die soon afterwards. His sisters were deeply distressed to see him being buried by Parsons Gayer and Moriarty. They recited an Irish *caoine* at the funeral which was translated by one who was