
Catholicism and Nationalism in Ireland: From Fusion in the 19th Century to Separation in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between Catholicism and nationalism in Ireland. It first explains the historic relationship between the Church and the Irish nationalist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It then briefly summarizes the historic role of the Church in Irish politics after independence. Finally, the article examines the diminishing political influence of Irish Catholicism in Irish politics by exploring the utility of various theories of secularisation. Like other recent work on secularisation, it attempts to historicize the debate regarding secularisation. While not agreeing with all aspects of historic secularisation theory, this approach is much more useful in explaining the dwindling power of the Catholic Church in Ireland today than more recent theories of secularisation that emphasize the vitality of religion in a more pluralistic and competitive setting.

Irish society has been frequently cited as one of the most religious societies in Europe, and the Catholic nature of Irish society became a defining element of Irish national identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries¹. Once the Irish Free State was created, the Church's power was such that secular political leaders deferred to ecclesiastical leaders in making policies that related to public morality. In the last twenty to thirty years, the position of the Church has changed dramatically, both in terms of the direct influence of the hierarchy on political elites as well as the more diffuse influence of the Church in shaping public opinion and molding individual behaviour to conform with Church teaching. This article examines the influence of Catholicism as well as the nexus between Church and State by utilizing theories of secularisation to explain the changing and diminished role Catholicism plays in defining Irish identity. As Philip Gorski (2000) suggests, any attempt to analyze the relevance of secularisation theory must attempt to place contemporary Church-State relations in its historic national context. While not agreeing with all aspects of traditional secularisation theory, this approach is much more useful in explaining the waning power of the Catholic Church in Ireland

today than more recent theories that emphasize the vitality of religion in a more pluralistic and competitive setting. I argue that secularisation in Ireland has meant that Catholicism as a source of national identity has diminished as religion has become more of a voluntary activity differentiated from other aspects of social and political life. This may not mean the end of religion but it does mean the decline of the power of the institutional Church in Irish political life.

The Historical Fusion of Catholicism and Irish Nationalism

Several overlapping reasons account for the merger of religious and national identity in nineteenth century Ireland. The origins of Irish nationalism derived from a reaction against British imperialism and an attempt to reinvent a Gaelic culture. The desire to overthrow the yoke of British tyranny united the different elements of Irish society. A dominant religion, in the case of Ireland the Catholic Church, played an important role in forging the unity that was necessary for nationalism to become an effective mass movement (Bruce 2003, 46; Girvin 2002, 3-14). Religious elites do not need to lead political movements for religions to play a role in national politics. Politicians and nationalist revolutionaries can employ religion as a force for their own secular political cause. In the case of Irish nationalism, the Catholic Church became a powerful political actor because of its success, especially in the period from 1860 to 1870 in dealing with the British government for nationalist causes (Larkin 1987). In addition, Catholicism was successfully conjoined with Irish nationalism by its identity as a persecuted Church, by the faithfulness of its followers, by the ability of the Church to organize and meet social circumstances, and by the need for nationalism to have some widely accepted source of identity in society.

As Gaelic Ireland increasingly lost its viability and receded to the Western corners of the island, the Irish masses needed some common bond upon which they could maintain or create their national identity. Catholicism served this function perfectly because it united the Irish in their devotion to the same faith. While Anthony Smith (2003, 151-4) identifies an ancient argument for the island's sacred status, most scholars focus on the strengthening nexus between Catholicism and Irish nationalism in the nineteenth century. John Whyte (1980) contended that the Liberal attack on the Church and its influence in society united Catholics in the Anglo-American world, including Ireland. Tony Fahey (1992, 246-8) has argued that Irish Catholicism revived as Irish society began to industrialise and link itself with the outside world, but even in rural Ireland of the early nineteenth century there was a unity between priests and the people in Ireland that provided much deference to ecclesiastical figures (Tanner 2001, 231). Irene Whelan (2005) contends that the attempt by Protestants to convert Catholics in the early nineteenth century led to a second Catholic counterreformation that strengthened the nexus between religion and national identity in Ireland. While the Irish case

clearly has some unique factors that may account for the fusion of Catholics and nationalism, David Martin (1978) cites a common pattern where a dominant religion fuses with nationalism to become part of the national identity. Therefore, one of the commonalities upon which Irish nationalists could forge a nation was the widespread adherence and devotion to the Catholic faith, one that Emmet Larkin (1975) identifies in his work on the devotional revolution in Ireland.

The faithfulness of the Irish to their religious heritage has historically provided the Church tremendous institutional power (Miller 1973). In the past the Church has been able to utilise its power to transmit its message effectively from the pulpit and through its control of the schools and the administration of social services (Whyte 1980). The result has been that Ireland is one of the most religious societies on earth. The Church has been able to influence the values and behaviour of the Irish people to conform to its doctrine and teachings. The Church's capacity to influence behaviour obviously extends to political concerns that the Church hierarchy interprets as impinging upon the faith and morals of the Irish people. To the extent that Ireland's continued participation in the British Empire had ramifications relevant to fundamental Catholic doctrines, one would naturally expect the Church to play a role in directing the emerging Irish nationalist movement. The Church's remarkable development in the nineteenth century allowed it to emerge based on the needs and conditions of the Irish in that time period. Its control of education for Catholics gave it not only a formative power in shaping individual values, but it also gained respect in society as the source and reservoir of intellectual thought. The Church also emphasized those values that were necessary in post-famine Ireland. Frugality and celibacy outside of marriage helped serve a social purpose of removing economic pressure from an impoverished economy. Thus, the Church played an important role in linking religious values and structures with the everyday living of the Irish (Inglis 1998, 8-9).

Although the Catholic bishops opposed violence as a means to pursue the Irish nationalist cause, the secular political need for a dynamic that could unify the Irish people nonetheless counteracted and overwhelmed the desires of the hierarchy. In the early twentieth century, the rapidly growing support for Sinn Féin and elevated status of those executed as martyrs made the Church leaders overlook any theological argument against the practical political need to support the cause of Irish nationalism (O'Brien 1994, 118-20). Nationalists utilised the common Catholic identity of the Irish to unite them for the cause of reinventing Gaelic Ireland. Nationalists were able to enlist Catholics for their cause since the vast majority of Catholics not only despised the English political domination of their island but also resented the historic British persecution of the Catholic Church (Girvin 2002, 15-6). Thus, the need for a common bond overlapped with an anti-British antagonism concerning the right to freely practice one's faith. The Catholic

religious identity served as a means of organizing and mobilizing the lower strata of society around the goal of defending the nation (Smith 1986, 159). By the late nineteenth century Catholicism was an integral part, if not the defining element, of Irish national identity (Collins 2002; Hempton 1996, 72-86; Inglis 1998).

A communitarian ethic deeply rooted in the Irish past also fostered the successful integration of national and religious identity. In spite of their historic political decentralization and the numerous foreign invasions and settlements, the Irish have perceived themselves as culturally homogenous—as one ethnic group—since the nineteenth century. This sense of unity built upon a Celtic sense of self and adapted from an aristocratic Gaelic order helped the Irish integrate and equate their Catholic and national identities. Larkin (1989) demonstrates that O’Connell’s founding of the Catholic Association in 1823 and his creating unity in Ireland around its traditional communitarian ethos was especially important in merging Irish nationalism and Roman Catholicism into an organic all-encompassing identity.

Another important characteristic of Irish Catholicism that helped promote the successful integration of national and religious identity in Ireland was the traditional strand of authoritarianism in the Irish Church and Irish culture (Garvin 2004, 254-5; McAllister 1983; Schmidt 1974). Because of its doctrine of infallibility and the fidelity of its followers, the Church was able to command an obedience and loyalty that made the Irish faithful willingly accept the directives of the Church. Eventually, as the Irish masses developed a devotion to the cause of nationalism, this movement could depend upon the fervent support of the Irish masses. This granted populist figures vast discretionary power to lead as they saw fit and expect leaders an unquestioning acceptance of their decisions.

After the founding of the Irish Free State, the Church hierarchy played a more conspicuous role in Irish political life. This nexus was epitomized by the deference early Irish governments showed to the bishops of Ireland and the Holy See (Keogh 1995). Nationalists who had effectively utilised references to the unique Catholic heritage of Ireland before independence continued to do so afterward. The passive role of the Church hierarchy during the Rising and its active opposition to the cause of violent revolution minimized its direct political influence in the years immediately after independence. Even though the heroes of the nationalist revolution did not heed the advice of Church leaders concerning the use of violence in the struggle for independence, the policies of the new state reflected their continued faith in the Church and in most if not all of its social teachings. These policies fulfilled the clergy’s desire to maintain a viable rural community that linked national nostalgia with Catholic social principles (Crotty 2006, 119). The Church endeavored to repel the threat it perceived from an urban life-style. For the Church this new life-style was antithetical to the traditional Irish

national identity and threatened the ideal Catholic social order. As a result, the Church hierarchy quickly learned to cooperate with those whose previously violent methods they had condemned (Keogh 1986; Murray 2000). The Church's strength as a social institution meant that it could complacently oversee Irish politics without worrying that state policy might deviate from its teachings. The tightening merger of Catholic and Gaelic identities that began in the struggle for independence continued afterward, contributing to the institutionalisation of the religious divide that separated North from South and Catholic from Protestant in Ireland (Fulton 1991; O'Brien 1994; Wiel 2003).

By the time De Valera wrote and Ireland enacted a new constitution in 1937, the Catholic religion was guaranteed a special role in society and the entire document adapted principles of corporatism that were popular in Church thinking at that time (Crotty 2006, 119; Kissane 2003; O'Leary 2000). Even though Whyte (1980) and John Cooney (1986) claim that the bureaucratic tendency of the state to expand its sphere of control in society collided with the Church's desire to retain its sphere of influence, the historic symbiosis of Catholic and Irish national identities permitted corporatism to be a successful means of organizing politics in post-independence Ireland. De Valera's constitution provided an effective and formal merger between the Catholic Church and the Irish nationalist elites (Girvin 2002, 106-35). As long as the Irish masses continued to equate their national and religious identities, there was no need to separate these two conceptually distinct aspects of Irish political identity.

The Challenge of Secularisation

While some have been critical of efforts to apply theories of secularisation to the Irish case (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 1995; Kissane 2003) and critical of the traditional theory (ies) of secularisation (Finke and Iannoccone 1993; Jelen and Wilcox 1998; Stark and Iannoccone 1994; Warner 1993), the decline in the status and power of the Church in Irish society justifies an effort to apply secularisation theories to determine how and if they apply to recent developments in Ireland. Despite the continuing power of the Church in terms of its control of primary and secondary education as well as its ideological or ideational control exhibited by its parish priests and hierarchy, the Church no longer possesses its historic role both in defining Irish identity and establishing the cultural values of Irish society.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the integration of Catholicism and national identity which had delayed or prevented the secularisation that had come to the rest of Europe finally yielded to those forces associated with the arrival of industrialisation and urbanisation (Fuller 2002; McLeod 1997, 21). Many scholars argued that the ascendance of science and reason in the Western world meant the diminution of the mystical force of religion (Wilson 1982). Modernity tended to

bring cultural and political pluralism. Ultimately, this liberalism was seen to be in conflict with traditional religious faith, including Christianity (Kraynak 2001). In the past thirty to forty years numerous efforts have been made to decipher the relationship between economic and social modernization and the decline of religion (Acquaviva 1979; Berger 1967; Martin 1978; Wilson 1982). Theories of secularisation have proliferated and so have definitions and diverse meanings for this concept. Many assumed that a dichotomy existed between an ethnic, rural society supportive of traditional religion and a conservative personal morality and an urban, cosmopolitan society more liberal theologically and in terms of personal morality. However, these static dichotomies could not detect the process of change and interaction between different religious and socio-psychological orientations of different national groups.

Many of the critics of the 'old' paradigm or traditional secularisation also contend that the empirical data does not support the conclusion that modernization yields a decline in religious participation in institutional religions. Citing data that religious participation in the United States has increased and held steady in Europe despite rapid modernization, a group of theorists have developed a supply side theory of secularisation. Instead of focusing on the transformation of the mass public and consumers of institutional religion, these scholars believe that the lack of competition and organized state religions create stale environments for consumers of religion. Religious authorities have little incentive to provide a comparative advantage to their consumers in religious services and thus their attendance and participation decline. Conversely, in regions and countries where religion has been separated from the state and more churches compete for followers, religious attendance and participation rises. Thus, this new paradigm of secularisation emphasizes the failure of traditional monopolistic religions to provide a good service to the people as the cause of decline in rates of participation (Finke 1990; Finke, Guest and Stark 1996; Finke and Iannaccone 1993; Iannaccone 1990; Jelen and Wilcox 1998; Stark and Iannoccone 1994; Stark and McCann 1993; Warner 1993). According to two advocates of this new economic paradigm of secularisation, society becomes desacralized as the traditional religion loses its monopolistic position. (Finke and Stark 2003).

While there are many defenders of this new paradigm of secularisation, there remain many critics of this new approach and defenders of the traditional paradigm (Bruce 1996; Casanova 1994; Chaves 1994; Lechner 1991; Yamane 1997). Most of the defenders of the old paradigm insist that its critics do not apply traditional secularisation correctly and that traditional secularisation theory has not been disproven or falsified by the evidence cited in the new secularisation literature. The core concepts of traditional secularisation theory - differentiation, rationalization, and worldliness (Tschannen 1991) - have occurred in most states experiencing economic modernisation and industrialisation. Examining data in a

large number of countries Mark Chaves and Philip Gorski (2001) find that increasing religious competition is not associated with increased religious participation. Thus, abundant evidence still supports the basic conclusions of early secularisation theory that there is increasing differentiation of religious institutions from other social institutions and that religious institutions have a declining scope of authority over individuals, organisation, and the society as a whole (Casanova 1994; Chaves 1994; Inglehart and Baker 2000; Lechner 1991; Yamane 1997). This is because the security provided by advanced societies allows individuals growing up in those societies to move beyond the religious values they inherit from previous generations raised in a less secure environment (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 18-20).

Rather than debate abstract theories of secularisation, I would like to apply one specific theory that derives from the traditional secularisation literature in terms of the case of the Republic of Ireland. The model that works best in the Irish case is that of David Martin (1978). Martin believes that those who are late industrialisers, those experiencing the second phase of industrial revolution as he identifies it, have much more profound secular changes associated with the industrial revolution. Early developers had such a long transition to the modern industrial world that their religious institutions were more able to adapt to the slower changes that enveloped society. The later developers experience such a quick and massive transformation that the religious institutions of society do not have adequate time to adapt. As a result, large scale structures organized on the principle of bureaucratic rationality replace the human scale social structures of the small home, medium-sized school, the bounded town, and the family farm. Generalized empathy communicated through the new mass media replaces the traditional voluntary associations. Those experiencing the second industrial revolution tend to have their institutionalised religion and traditional structures of control or discipline give way to hedonistic consumerism. Thus, the societal level change associated with industrialisation transforms individual religious attitudes and behaviours.

Some scholars from the traditional school interpret secularisation primarily as the decline of organized religion in society. S.S. Acquaviva (1979), for example, argues that the religion of science has replaced traditional religion with the secularisation of religious structures and societal objects. Religion no longer has the capacity to inform culture or the power to make decisions at times of social conflict. As religious institutions decay, religion loses its capacity to affect societal behaviour. Non-religious institutions become the ultimate arbiters in society (Bruce 1996; Lechner 1991; Martin 1978; Wilson 1982). More and more sectors of society are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. At the least, secularisation limits organized religion to a differentiated and specialized role in society (Casanova 1994; Chaves 1994; Yamane 1997). In the most extreme cases,

secularisation banishes religion from the public domain and only survives in an almost secret privacy of personal beliefs and devotion (Inglehart and Baker 2000; Wuthnow 1998).

The secularisation of religious institutions and narrowing of their domain increasingly limits religion to a private expression in individuals' lives (Berger 1967). Some, however, contend that individual level religious values have diminished, not just become a private concern. Whether one interprets this change as decline or privatization, one needs to evaluate secularisation at the individual level in one of three different dimensions. Marie Cornwall *et al.*'s (1986) empirical work verifies that a difference exists between the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of individual religiosity.

First, as Robert Bellah (1968) argues, modernisation disturbs the pre-existing structures of meaning that religion traditionally provided. The cognitive level of secularisation results in a transition from a traditional institutional set of beliefs to the adoption of a personal orthodoxy. This means that individuals begin to question doctrines of religious belief and seek to develop their own private set of beliefs based on their own personal experiences and needs (Yamane 1997). Individuals also alter their orientation to religion. As individuals become less inspired by the forces of religion, they become less committed to religion itself (Wilson 1982). They lose allegiance to a particular church and become more committed to their own particular spiritual values (Cornwall, *et al.*, 1986). This changing commitment to one's own personal beliefs makes one less deferential to those religious institutions that had demanded so much allegiance in the past (Yamane 1997). Individuals will increasingly abandon their commitment to an organised religion if it conflicts with their own personal morality. Finally, one can identify a behavioural transition from institutional religious devotion to private or personal behaviour or the use of other moral or ethical sources as determinants of behaviour. The sacred becomes a personal experience outside of the ecclesiastical teaching authority and bureaucratic control of a religious institution. Religion becomes desacralized as individuals increasingly seek to find meaning in life outside the religious institutions of a society. Religious behaviour does not have to be controlled or coordinated by the traditional forces of organized religion.

One of the major problems especially notable in early theories of secularisation was the tendency to oversimplify the changing role of religion in industrialising societies. Many exaggerated the extent of personal abandonment of religion as well as the institutional decline of religion in society. Empirical evidence often failed to confirm the assumptions and assertions of early secularisation theorists. A more modest and precise theory of secularisation, one that would take into account the unique historical circumstances of religion in a society, has proven more useful in explaining the changing role of religion in modern industrial societies. Hence, my

analysis of secularisation in Ireland will utilize general theories but place these in the context of Ireland's unique historical experience.

Catholic societies, especially ones that have had a repressed national culture such as Ireland, often deflect the trend toward secularisation because of the paramount need for unity (Martin 1978). This preserves the traditional fusion of Church and state in monopolistic Catholic societies. The historical discrimination against Irish Catholics in their own country has led them to be extraordinarily proud of their national and religious heritage. Whereas many nations take their religious heritage for granted, the Irish are especially proud of the Catholicism that has served as a badge of national identity for more than a century. Because of the historical discrimination against Catholicism the Irish pride in their religious belief was historically not positive and confident but defensive and insular in its orientation.

Since secularisation typically threatens the political power of traditional elites in society, the clerics and their faithful followers will strive to maintain their power and the relevance of their religion in the modernizing society. Hence, the onslaught of a new secular world typically results in a religious counterattack where religion tries to regain a public space (Casanova 1994). This is especially the case in Catholic countries where the more encompassing holistic faith competes with secular progress instead of trying to coalesce with it as in Protestant societies (Martin 1985). Bellah (1968) identifies two different reactions to the threat posed by the forces of liberalism and secularisation. The first is that of Romantic Nationalism which stresses national solidarity based on primordial ties of language, ethnic origin, or religion. The other alternative is Radical Nationalism. Clearly, the Irish of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century conformed to the pattern of Romantic Nationalism in terms of their attachment to the connection to their Celtic past. The conflict between a modern and more secular metropole and its less developed colony helped forge a Romantic Nationalism in Ireland. In the initial years after independence, the Irish continued to confront the threat of a secular materialistic culture emanating from the West by striving to maintain or promote their unique Catholic-Celtic identity.

Entering the twenty-first century, one would expect an even more strident Irish response to the inundation of secular Western culture. Contemporary religious developments in Ireland, however, provide evidence that confrontation between the new secular society and the traditional religion need not result in indissoluble conflict. Religion may readily adapt to the changing context of the urban industrial era. Because religion has the capacity to transform itself or in the jargon of the new paradigm learn to compete in a more pluralistic religious setting, many remain skeptical of the inevitability of secularisation (Finke and Iannaccone 1993; Stark and McCann 1993; Warner 1993). Peter Berger (1967) identifies a pattern where religious traditions lose their monopolised position in society. The privatisation of

religiosity accompanies the secularisation of society. Tolerance of differing religions and patterns of belief become the norm and a more pluralistic and ecumenical society is the result. The Catholic Church has attempted to make its peace with modernity and a more pluralistic, democratic society since Vatican II (Berger 2004, 76-7). This Council attempted to forge an uneasy truce between the secular values of modern industrial societies and the Catholic tradition. Religion was to be demystified, to become more this-worldly. These changes, while most dramatic in some parts of the developing world where liberation theology has seemingly removed the Church from supernatural concerns, have not been as evident in the Irish Church. A conservative hierarchy and the traditional fusion of Catholicism and historic Irish nationalism have made it difficult for both priest and prelate to bring about an *aggiornamento* of the Catholic religion in Ireland. Instead, Irish society has become more secular as the Catholic Church loses its 'moral monopoly' in society (Inglis 1998). A changing and more secular lay elite emerged beginning in the 1960s, and the Church has yet to accommodate this anti-clerical trend in Irish society (Garvin 2004, 256-62). Corkery (1999) argues that Irish theology needs to change and take into account the cultural changes in society. The traditional desire for discipline and self-denial has not allowed Irish Catholicism to make an accommodation with liberalism or with valuing individual self-expression. The Church is thus put in a defensive position as it continues to interpret the materialism of affluence and indifference to spiritual values as its most immediate threats.

Nevertheless, the Church in Ireland has begun to make changes in recent years that follow the spirit of Vatican II and that are changing the role of Catholicism in the social and political life of the nation. The Church has sponsored a growing ecumenical movement, emphasising the commonalities that all Christians share and thereby removing much of the parochialism that has historically been associated with Irish Catholicism. The Church has also allowed more freedom of discussion, and there is less clerical control as the laity has become increasingly involved in Church matters. Despite these modest changes, the Republic of Ireland remains an overwhelmingly Catholic state in terms of religious identification and the power of the Church remains remarkably strong in terms of its influence on many political matters (Kissane 2003). This would seem to contradict the conventional wisdom that industrial high culture severs the historical link between faith and a dominant national Church. The evidence indicates that Ireland's comparatively high level of religiosity has begun to conform to other Catholic countries (Inglehart, Basanez, and Moreno 1998; Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 1995). Fahey (1992, 257) noted that there had been a slight decline in Church attendance and a more marked decline in monthly confession since the 1960s, but he argued that convention and social conformity maintain high levels of devotionism rather than the persistence of personal religious conviction. Weekly Mass attendance data for the mid-1990s indicated that religious participation had

indeed declined in Ireland and had fallen into the mid-sixties as a percent of population (Donnelly 2000). Other studies show a slight and statistically insignificant decline in church attendance in the 1980s and 1990s (Greeley and Ward 2000, 601).

While surveys indicate that religious beliefs and practices have not declined as much as some have suggested (Ibid, 600), there has clearly been a decline in the Church's popularity and power as a social institution. The Irish public has lost confidence in the Church as an organisation, increasingly believing that the Church has too much power in society and increasingly disapproving of the Church trying to influence voting or the government (Ibid). These attitudes diverge sharply from those found in the 1960s in Bruce Biever's (1976) analysis. He found that 82% of those surveyed did not believe that the Church was too involved in politics (Ibid, 307). Secularisation has meant that being a devout Catholic is no longer as important in achieving a position of power in Irish society, whether that position is in the world of politics, business, the media, sport, and most other ways of life (Inglis 2003). If the Church has lost prestige in Irish society, it has also lost its ability to have the faithful conform to its teachings regarding sexual morality. There have been slight but statistically significant declines in Irish belief that sex should never occur outside of marriage and that abortion is always wrong (Greeley and Ward 2000, 601). Both the decline in fidelity to Church teaching and confidence in the Church have been declining since the 1980s as reported in the European Values Survey (Ibid). This decline as well as other survey evidence indicates that the Irish mass public is increasingly skeptical of the Church due to so many recent scandals.

While the Irish have not abandoned the Church en-masse, there clearly has been a failure in effectively transmitting aspects of the faith to the Irish youth – those most affected by the changes that have come to Irish society. Instead of a legalistic adherence to Catholic dogmas, the Irish youth were developing an individualistic faith. This increased alienation of the youth of Ireland from the Church has led Dobbeleare (1995, 14) to conclude that we are witnessing the first generation of the unchurched and a growing secularisation as a result. The changes coming to the Church in Ireland are a response to the complex changes occurring in Irish society that have been so evident in the past thirty years (Hornsby-Smith 1992). Catholicism still serves as a basis of national identity. In fact, Conor Cruise O'Brien (1994) argues that despite socioeconomic changes in Ireland the historical fusion of Catholic and Irish national identity remains intact. Other behavioural indicators demonstrate that even though the Irish remain identified with the Church they do not necessarily follow its moral precepts in terms of their own personal behaviour. The Irish are intellectually defecting from their Church's teachings while severing themselves from the social and emotional bonds they have with the Church to a lesser degree. The disaffection of the youth may indicate

a disintegration of the social bonds created by religion or may be the result of unsatisfying social experiences in addition to the intellectual defection more common in the general population. In any event, they indicate that secularisation is likely to continue in Ireland in the coming decades.

Implications of Secularisation for Irish Nationalism

Although nationalism is typically depicted as a secular ideology, it often exists as in Ireland in a religious context. There are several reasons why Catholicism and the fusion of the Church and national identity have not followed the path of secularisation so common in the rest of the world. First, despite the secularising tendency of socioeconomic modernisation, social groups in general and the Irish in particular continue to desire a common fate. This common fate was forged a century ago when those advocating the independence of Ireland utilised the commonality of Catholicism on behalf of the cause of nationalism. This historical and institutional cohesion helped Ireland resist the secularising tendencies of Western mass culture. Biever's (1976, 314) found that even in the early 1960s, the link between the Church and Irish patriotism remained very strong.

However, the increased productive capacity of the modern industrial societies makes religion no longer necessary for cultural integration. In the Irish case the arrival of cafeteria Catholicism, personally selecting those items on the menu of Catholic faith one wishes to believe, threatens to unravel the historical fusion of Catholic and national identity. The Irish continue to be dedicated to the Catholicism as a badge of national identity, but a consumer orientation to the religious world undermines the Church's capacity to shape individual values (Garvin 2004, 268-70). Instead of an unquestioning attitude and complete obedience to all Church directives, the Irish like many others are increasingly picking and choosing those moral precepts of the Church that they wish to believe and re-imagining transcendence outside of the context of the Church (Inglehart 1997, 225; Maignant 2003). When many Irish abandon parts of their Catholic faith, they do so without feeling the loss of the fullness of the truth and the organic bond between their Catholic and Irish national identity. The traditional collectivist expression of identity Catholicism brought to the Irish is being undermined by the individual's ability to increasingly select and choose sources of social and national identity independent of one another. Secularisation has helped sever the connection between religious and national identity. The proponents of historic Irish nationalism supported the wholesale acceptance of the Catholic Faith and a close relationship between the Church and state in Ireland. This is clearly no longer the case in the more pluralistic Ireland of the twenty-first century.

Because of recent criticism and a common perception that the Church had too much direct influence in Irish politics, the Irish hierarchy has attempted to separate

itself from partisan politics more than ever before. Historically, the bishops have rarely become directly involved in the political debate of the nation (Fitzgerald 2003, 34-5), but in recent times it has made a more conscientious effort to remove itself from even appearing to play a role in the political life of the nation. Perhaps this voluntary withdrawal from such an active watchdog role in combination with the increased personal discretion individuals now have concerning their faith explains why so many claim that Irish society is far less responsive to the teachings of the Catholic Church. The diminution of the authority and its voluntary retreat from partisan political involvement have begun to minimize the role of Catholicism in defining Irish national identity and in molding public opinion in an increasingly secular society. This amounts to a move for the Irish state to play a more neutral role in regard to religion in society (Girvin 1996).

To the extent secularisation has had an impact on Irish society, it has threatened to undermine the faith of even those who maintain their religious beliefs. Berger (1967) posits that once a pluralistic society and ecumenism are accepted a 'Crisis of Theology' follows. The difficulty in maintaining the veracity of faith and accepting another's as equal spawns a crisis of relativistic thinking. Those who make the compromise with a secular society simultaneously do so at the danger of losing their own capacity to sustain their religious beliefs. In Ireland this means that an increased tolerance for a pluralistic culture threatens the very religious and national identity of the Irish people. Public efforts to accommodate the desire for a more pluralistic society have failed to convince the Irish masses that their religious beliefs would not be compromised. The historic separation of function if not of culture and ideology between the religious and partisan political worlds in Ireland has widened in the past few years. Whether the secularisation of individual attitudes or the voluntary retreat of the Church from attempting to influence partisan politics caused the widening of the gulf between Church and state, it is clear that the institutional power of the Church has been reduced in the political life of the nation even if the Irish state cannot yet be said to be neutral toward religion as in a classic liberal state (Girvin 1996; Kissane 2003). Historically, personal friendships and relationships between politicians and the clergy guaranteed the influence in the partisan political debate (Keogh 1986). Today, politicians pay less homage to prelates. An ecumenical Christian spirit dominates the Dáil rather than a divisive or parochial Catholic one. Even though the Irish perceive religion to be less of an all embracing ideology, there remains a psychological pressure to maintain Catholicism as an element of national identity.

To the extent the Irish withstand the onslaught of secularisation their religiosity may continue in the postmodern era. Even though the youth of Ireland are apparently abandoning the faith of their ancestors, Inglehart and Baker (2000) argue that traditional religious values associated with the pre-industrial period may well survive into the postmaterial era of affluence. Wuthnow (1998) believes

religion can continue to be practiced in this era of secularisation, but it is increasingly done so outside of the traditional institutional context. Luckman (1967) and Wilson (1982) argue that religion may be even more necessary as individuals seek fuller self-realization and expression. Besecke (2005) contends that we need to reconceptualise religion as an evolving societal conversation regarding transcendental meaning to understand the role of religion in a secularising society. Achilles (1993) finds evidence of this kind of postmodern religion in Irish dramatists who have increasingly turned to religion to search for redemptive factors in a world that increasingly seems to lack meaning. Thus, religion may take a different form, but it is likely to persist and may even thrive under these new circumstances.

Despite the claims of O'Brien (1994), the changing role and character of Irish Catholicism may yet transform Irish nationalism into a more tolerant and accepting ideology, ready to accept the diversity of all who live in Ireland. Instead of religion serving as a signpost of distinct conceptions of national identity, a secular Ireland clearly erodes a principal source of parochial political identity in the Irish Republic and thereby minimizes a source of political conflict within the larger Irish context. Perhaps the decoupling of Catholicism and Irish national identity will allow a more secular and inclusive national identity to form that will be more able to compromise or at least coexist in peace with the Unionist tradition, especially in Northern Ireland (Coakley 2002, 25).. This may allow Irish identity to be recreated to be more inclusive of the growing plurality of religious practices and beliefs that is characterising the postmodern Ireland of the twenty-first century (McDonagh 2003). The growing plurality of religious beliefs, values, and behaviour may make the south of Ireland less of a homogenous 'popish state' to be feared by Protestants in the north of Ireland. This may lay the foundation for improved political relationships in the future between the two religious and political traditions that are present on the island.

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Notes

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