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Religion and Nationalism in the Pursuit  
of Universal Civil Rights and Home Rule  
in Ireland

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Daniel O'Connell's Struggle to Harness Religion and Nationalism in the Pursuit of Universal  
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Colin Daunt  
History 400  
December 14, 2012

Religion and nationalism have always been an explosive mix. Few countries can rival Ireland for the impact this relationship has had on its history. Modern Ireland is defined by these two forces: the island is split into two pieces, the Catholic majority Republic of Ireland, and Protestant majority Northern Ireland. Yet, the partition of Ireland was not ‘destined’ to happen. Up until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Irish nationalists were Protestants, not Catholics. It was only in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Daniel O’Connell, a Catholic, took over leadership of the Irish nationalist movement that this began to change. O’Connell worked to create an Irish identity for the Catholics of the island and make the nationalist movement work for the Catholics as well as the Protestants in Ireland. But the Protestants had different goals and many did not involve the Catholics.

The Catholic Church and the Irish nationalist movement became both tied together and in conflict. Five-sixths of the Irish population was Catholic, yet this majority was denied many basic British civil rights. O’Connell and the nationalists wanted British civil rights extended to Catholics as well as Protestants, a legislature in Dublin to address Irish concerns and a non-sectarian state where the government did not impose a religion on the people. The Catholic Church represented and had access to the island’s majority Catholic population, yet had less influence on the island than it wanted because Ireland was ruled by Protestant Britain. Thus the nationalists’ and the Church’s goals for a more independent Ireland had some synergy, but also significant tension between them that O’Connell had to manage.

The main source of this tension was the wealthy Protestant minority, descended from English and Scottish settlers, who had dominated Ireland’s resources and government for several hundred years. Their objectives for Ireland differed from both the Nationalists and the Catholic

Church. Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century they wanted an Ireland that was independent of Great Britain, so they could rule it as they had in the decades preceding 1800 and the Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland. Since the Protestants were the minority in Ireland at one-sixth of the population, the Protestants feared that Catholic emancipation would result in Catholic domination and revenge for the previous centuries of English oppression. These fears caused the Protestants to watch O'Connell's movement for Catholic emancipation with growing alarm.

British law granted certain civil rights only to members of the Anglican Church. For example, Catholics could not be lawyers, could not hold political office, and could not own weapons. O'Connell's first goal was Catholic emancipation, arguing that civil rights granted to Anglicans should be extended to Catholics (and Protestant Dissenters). As a Catholic he wanted those rights for himself and for his fellow Irishmen, and as a son of the Enlightenment he believed that a modern state should not limit the civil rights of its citizens based on their religion.

One of O'Connell's first steps in his campaign to achieve Catholic emancipation was to gain the support of the Catholic Church, which was potentially a powerful ally due to its institutional and administrative reach across the entire island. While the Church had not been actively involved in Irish politics to this point, it had priests in churches all over Ireland through whom the Church could reach the millions of Irish Catholics scattered across the island. With the Church's help, O'Connell would have a much easier time mobilizing and communicating with his people in order to gain support for his campaign. Once O'Connell raised the possibility, the Catholic Church could easily justify becoming politically active, because the expansion of Catholic civil rights would directly affect the Church and all its members. This alliance of O'Connell's nationalists and the Catholic Church succeeded and gained the civil emancipation of Irish Catholics in 1829.

Though O'Connell was ultimately successful in winning Catholic emancipation, his alliance with the Catholic Church made the Protestants wary of his ultimate goals. Protestants saw O'Connell as a Catholic first and a nationalist second. They did not trust him to include them in the Irish Parliament he wanted so badly. The Protestants feared that the Catholics' newly earned right to run for political office meant that Catholics would likely earn seats in an Irish parliament, and because they were five-sixths of the population, have a significant majority in that body. Protestants feared that the Catholic voters, which were only a minority of Catholics due to property restrictions on voting rights, would only vote for other Catholics, leaving Protestants out of power and at the mercy of the Irish Catholics and their Church. O'Connell was aware of the Protestants' fears and tried to assure them that the institutional Catholic Church would have no influence on governmental decisions and that he would not impose restrictions on Protestants based on their religion. O'Connell's goal was a non-sectarian Ireland where every person had freedom of conscience and the government could not tell a man what to believe or penalize him for his religious beliefs.

The two main primary sources for this paper are some of Daniel O'Connell's speeches and William Joseph O'Neill Daunt's diary, and while they have extensive information, both men were Catholic nationalists. It was difficult to find a variety of primary sources addressing the topic of this paper, which led to the paper being based on two Catholics' perspectives; the Protestant's view could only come from secondary sources or speculation. This gives the paper to a bit of a Catholic tilt and no counterbalancing Protestant point of view. As well as primary sources being difficult to come across, the historiography on this topic is rather sparse. Books about Irish history and nationalism discuss O'Connell, his work and the events in his lifetime, but tend not to go into detail about the early 19<sup>th</sup> century tensions between the movement for

Catholic emancipation and the movement for the repeal of the Union, preferring to focus on other topics. Much of the research into the relationship between Irish nationalism and Catholicism looks at the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, not the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

One source that does take a more in depth look at religion and nationalism in O’Connell’s time was Lawrence E. McCaffrey’s essay on the sources of Irish nationalism in *Perspectives of Irish Nationalism*, a collection of essays edited by Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence E. McCaffrey. In his essay McCaffrey spends a few pages on O’Connell, looking at his work and some of the reasoning behind it. McCaffrey wrote that O’Connell saw Catholicism as a “culture and identity, as well as faith, the only cohesive force among the Catholic majority,”<sup>1</sup> and this was why he worked at merging Catholicism with nationalism. Overall McCaffrey focuses on how O’Connell used Catholicism to aid nationalism, but did not look at the complex interplay between nationalism and both the Catholic and Protestant churches or how these relationships effected the Repeal movement. Other authors just acknowledge that nationalists were mostly Catholics and then move on with their story, not pausing to take a look at why this happened. This paper looks at the why. Why did Irish nationalism become Irish Catholic nationalism when generations of Irish nationalists dreamed of a united, non-sectarian Ireland? Irish nationalism became Catholic because of Daniel O’Connell’s work for Catholic Emancipation, specifically the alliance he made with the Catholic Church to attain it. After creating this alliance, he could not get the Protestants to trust him and thus could not get their support for the nationalist cause.

### **Irish History Before the Union**

The conflict between Britain and Ireland stretches back to the 1100s when the King of Leinster invited Strongbow (an Anglo-Norman knight) to Ireland to help win him back his

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence E. McCaffrey, eds., *Perspectives on Irish Nationalism* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 6.

kingdom; the price was that Strongbow became his heir. For the next several centuries, English and Irish fortunes waxed and waned until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when England finally asserted control over the entire island after defeating Hugh O'Neill at the Battle of Kinsale in 1602. This had major ramifications on the rest of Irish history. First, this occurred at the end of Elizabeth I's reign by which time the Anglican Church had been established as the Church of England. The Church of Ireland (the Irish version of the Anglican Church) became the established church for Ireland, even though the Irish population was Catholic. Second, when Hugh O'Neill fled from Ulster after his defeat, the English Crown confiscated his lands and those of his supporters. The crown granted these lands or plantations to loyal Protestants from Britain, mostly Scotland, to ensure that they had loyal subjects on the island.<sup>2</sup> This would not have been a major issue if the English had been able to convert the Irish to the Anglican Church. But they failed. As a result all the English plantations managed to achieve was the establishment of a sizeable minority (in the 1820's the Protestants were one-sixth of Ireland's population) that was at odds with the majority Catholic population.

This religious divide became a cultural divide over the ensuing centuries. Over the course of the Reformation, England had become a staunchly Protestant country with English, and later British, identity and Protestantism becoming tied together. The Irish, on the other hand, remained Catholics. In 1876 William Joseph O'Neill Daunt, a leading figure in the Irish nationalist movement in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote about the origins of the religious conflict in Ireland. Contrasting the English Protestant feeling was the closeness of the "national feeling of Irishmen" and the Catholic Church. The Irish "received that religion from Saint Patrick. It has been handed down to [them] through fourteen centuries. The national sentiment of

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence E. McCaffrey, *The Irish Experience Since 1800: A Concise History*, 3rd ed. (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), 7.

the Irish masses revolts against Protestantism, because Protestantism was thrust upon Ireland by England, which country had richly earned Irish hatred by a persistent course of confiscation, treachery, massacre and insolence.”<sup>3</sup> The Irish had always been Catholics and had been Christian longer than the British, so Catholicity was already closely tied to Irish identity. When the English became Protestant it gave the Irish another reason to be Catholic: it was anti-English. England had conquered Ireland, killed many Irish to do so and evicted Irishmen from their land, and now they wanted to convert the Irish to their religion. With Protestantism so tightly bound to English identity, there was absolutely no incentive for the Irish to convert, and very few did. Except for the farmers on the English plantations, for much of Ireland’s history the only Protestants were the English landlords, especially in the southern three provinces of Leinster, Munster, and Connaught.

This cultural divide had great ramifications for the future of Anglo-Irish relations. As religion and culture merged in both England and Ireland it hardened their opposing positions. Thomas Hachey and Lawrence McCaffrey wrote about this in their book on the history of Ireland: as the religions and cultures coalesced: “to uphold cultural and political autonomy, England justified conquest and control in Ireland as a protection against popery’s alien, tyrannical, and subversive presence.”<sup>4</sup> Since the two cultures were moving in opposite directions (Catholic and Protestant) the English could easily justify their conquest to themselves and the people of Britain by saying that they were opposing the threat posed by a Catholic neighbor. Britain always feared that Spain or France would invade Ireland either to hurt Britain, to use Ireland as a stepping stone from which to invade Britain, to help their fellow Catholics, or all three.

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<sup>3</sup> William Joseph O’Neill Daunt, *Diary of William Joseph O’Neill Daunt* (Unpublished, 1880), 580.

<sup>4</sup> Hachey and McCaffrey, *The Irish Experience Since 1800: A Concise History*, 5.



The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw many positives and negatives for the Irish in their relations with Great Britain. The greatest of the negatives were the Penal Laws, passed in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of the most egregious of the Penal Laws forbid Catholic clergy from entering Ireland, banned Catholics from holding seats in parliament, did not allow for Catholic schools, prevented Catholics from owning land (they could only lease it), and required a Catholic landlord to distribute his land to all his sons, but if one son converted to Protestantism, he would gain the entire estate.<sup>5</sup> These restrictions made it very difficult for Catholics to live in the British Isles as they were denied many of the rights held by Anglicans. The most damaging of those mentioned was likely the distribution of land as it meant that each generation of Catholics would be poorer than the last. The goal of Daniel O’Connell’s emancipation agitation was to have these laws rescinded and civil rights granted to all non-Anglicans in the United Kingdom.

Some progress was made towards amending the Penal Laws in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but some deplorable ones remained. In the late 1770’s the Irish parliament passed a Relief Bill that granted the Catholics the right to lease land for 999 years and repealed the law that allowed a son to inherit everything if he converted to the Church of Ireland.<sup>6</sup> Some Irishmen believed that this was just an attempt to appease the Catholics when England was in a crisis so the Irish would not revolt. When O’Connell looked back at the concessions made by the Protestant Irish Parliament, he matched every concession to a crisis. He saw that concessions were given when Britain needed Irish manpower for her wars in the 1780’s and late 1790’s, but when, in 1792, the Catholics petitioned for the ability to become lawyers and there was no immediate crisis in process, the petition “was accordingly rejected, all the members of the government voting for

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 21.

that rejection.”<sup>7</sup> Later, when the British began to get involved in the wars of the French Revolution, “that same Government brought in a bill still further to relax the 'Penal Code.’”<sup>8</sup> The British needed the Irish in wartime for soldiers and needed to prevent them from rebelling, so they granted concessions, but when the ‘Irish Question’ was not of immediate concern, they ignored it. This is why O’Connell worked so hard to establish an organization that could push for Catholic rights; the British would not grant them in peace time without severe Irish pressure.

The French Revolution created many problems for Ireland. Before it began the parliament in Dublin had limited autonomy from the Imperial Parliament in Westminster. But the Dublin parliament was only open to Anglicans, and Catholics remained barred from having a say in the governance of an island where they were five-sixths of the population. The group that arose to challenge this power imbalance was the United Irishmen, founded by Presbyterians in Belfast in 1791. Their goals were to end their subservience to the Church of Ireland<sup>9</sup> and, according to WJ Daunt’s diary, “to form a brotherhood of affection among Irishmen of every religious persuasion, and ... to obtain an equal, full and adequate representation of all the people of Ireland.”<sup>10</sup> The goal of the United Irishmen was a united Ireland, where there was no difference between men of different religions. Though they may not have fully trusted the Catholics, they were willing to fight for their rights.

The United Irishmen tried to win emancipation through the Irish parliament, but the MPs were not ready to concede it at that time in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. As ideas from the French Revolution filtered into Ireland, the United Irishmen adopted many of them and altered their goal

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel O’Connell, *A Memoir on Ireland Native and Saxon* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1970), 23.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Dennis Dworkin, ed., *Ireland and Britain, 1798-1922: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2012), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Daunt, *Diary of William Joseph O’Neill Daunt*, 595.

to be the creation of an Irish republic. The United Irishmen could not achieve this on their own or through Constitutional means, so they took a drastic step: they called the French for help. They planned an invasion of Ireland with the French and assured the French that the Irish people would rise up and fight. The invasion was launched in 1798, with French soldiers landing in County Mayo, Connaught, but they did not find the support that the United Irishmen had told them existed. The French soldiers “detected little republican or nationalist support. But they did find recruits among the peasants, who believed ... that the French had come 'as champions of the pope and the Virgin Mary.’”<sup>11</sup> The majority of Irish people at the time had few concerns beyond survival. Irish peasants at the time had one identity: Catholic; they did not yet conceive of themselves as Irish or that they had anything in common with the other residents of the island besides their Catholic religion. The invasion failed as the French were easily defeated by the British garrison because that they had no Irish support. The United Irishmen were premature in their assumption of an Irish nation. But their legacy would affect Ireland for generations. They established the Irish idea of physical force nationalism and martyrdom,<sup>12</sup> an idea O’Connell would have to suppress. Their invasion was one of the main justifications for the Act of Union, and they set the stage for Daniel O’Connell to create the Irish nation they had presupposed to exist.

### **The Union**

The Act of Union in 1800 is one of the pivotal events in Irish history. The Union eliminated the Irish parliament in Dublin and merged it with the Imperial parliament in Westminster. It significantly altered the nature of the Anglo-Irish relationship by making Ireland at the same time more and less important to Britain. Under the Act of Union there would now be

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<sup>11</sup> Dworkin, *Ireland and Britain, 1798-1922: An Anthology of Sources*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Irishmen in the Westminster parliament, but because their numbers were so small (the Irish had about 100 MPs, out of about 600 total members, and they were divided), they could regularly be ignored by the British MPs. The British came up with the idea of the Union as a way to deal with the Irish Question. Irish historian Oliver MacDonagh, wrote that “the Act of Union was a deliberate counter to these phenomena [of Irish nationalism and republicanism]; and so long as it was maintained, it was more or less threatened by the forces which had provoked its inception.”<sup>13</sup> The Union was intended to counter Irish nationalism, which meant that it would always be opposed by the nationalists. As a result it was always going to be in a precarious position and the British needed to ensure that the nationalists never gained enough power to challenge it. In 1800 this may not have appeared to be a great challenge because most Irish nationalists were Protestants who could relatively easily be assimilated into British society. The challenge for the British was to assimilate them before the Catholics joined the nationalist movement. They succeeded at assimilating the Protestants, but they failed to prevent the rise of Irish Catholic Nationalism.

Each of the parties involved in the Union came to see that they had something to gain from it. The Irish Protestants did not want to risk the Catholics gaining rights when they were five-sixths of the population, but if they had to get them, better it be as a minority in the United Kingdom. Some Irish Protestants, such as the Earl of Clare, who led the movement towards the Union, believed, according to Irish historians Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence J. McCaffrey, “that there could never be democracy and civil rights in Ireland because Protestants descended from the conquerors who had robbed natives of their property and then enslaved them. Therefore, it would be unreasonable not to expect an emancipated Catholic majority to insist on

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<sup>13</sup> Oliver MacDonagh, *Ireland: The Union and Its Aftermath* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1977), 14.

the restoration of what was once theirs.”<sup>14</sup> Protestants feared retaliation for their actions towards the Catholics over the centuries and therefore wanted to prevent the Catholics from being able to reciprocate. Some Protestants feared that the Catholics would impose their own version of the Penal Laws against Protestants or confiscate Protestant property to give back to Catholics, if Catholics gained control of the Dublin Parliament.<sup>15</sup> The Irish Protestants preferred either an Irish state with them in charge or a Union with Great Britain where they would be safe from Catholic vengeance. The Irish Protestants ideally would have preferred to remain in power in the parliament in Dublin as “they imagined that their hard-won autonomy and dominance [would be] swept away”<sup>16</sup> in a Union with Britain. As the Irish representatives in Westminster they would have much less influence on decisions than they did in Dublin and Irish affairs would become secondary to Imperial ones. These positions meant that some Protestants initially opposed the Union that they would later be willing to fight to defend.

Surprisingly, in light of later events, many Catholics supported the Union when it was being discussed in 1800. For many Catholics “the Union promised, immediately and with no dangerous violence, their prime objective, political and civil emancipation.”<sup>17</sup> For the middle class Catholics at the time, their rights were their most important political goal. They did not believe that they would achieve emancipation under a Protestant parliament in Dublin. They would rather gain emancipation as part of Britain and have a say in the government, than keep their restricted lives in Ireland where they had no say in the governance of their country. Their support also likely reflects the weakness of nationalism in Catholic Ireland at the time. Though the British generally only made concessions under pressure, they did gradually make life easier

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<sup>14</sup> Hachey and McCaffrey, *The Irish Experience Since 1800: A Concise History*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>16</sup> Dworkin, *Ireland and Britain, 1798-1922: An Anthology of Sources*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> MacDonagh, *Ireland: The Union and Its Aftermath*, 16.

for Catholics by allowing them to do things such as open schools and vote (though they still could not run for political office), so they likely believed that they would continue to gain incrementally improved lives under the British, or at least would be better off under British, rather than Irish Protestant rule.

The British government knew what both sides wanted from a Union and saw benefits for itself as well. From its perspective, the Union could solve the Irish problem as “incorporation or at least containment within a single kingdom, seemed more practicable than outright subjection, all the more as the safeguard of religious discrimination was weakening year by year.”<sup>18</sup> As the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment spread, direct subjugation was harder to justify, so the British hoped that the Irish Catholics could be more easily controlled as a minority in the United Kingdom rather than the majority in Ireland. This would allow the British to give the Catholics their rights at some point in the future without giving them control of Ireland. But since many Protestants in Ireland and Britain did not want Catholics to gain civil rights, the British government had a conundrum on their hands. How does one convince the two groups that the Union will be good for them, when they wanted different and mutually exclusive things?

Simply, tell each side that you will give them what they want and then not give it to one of them. The Protestants were told that the Catholics would remain oppressed and the Catholics were told that they would be emancipated. The British strategy, according to WJ Daunt, was, in part, to deny Catholic emancipation before the Union passed as the British believed that “were the Catholic question to be now carried, the great argument for an Union would be lost, at least so far as the Catholics are concerned.”<sup>19</sup> The British government needed the carrot of emancipation to hold before the Catholics to get them to agree to the Union; without it they

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> William Joseph O’Neill Daunt, *Ireland and Her Agitators*, Legacy Reprint Series (Kessinger Publishing, 1867), 13.

would have no chance. William Pitt, the British PM at the time, told Catholics that the Union would be good for them and that he would grant them emancipation as soon as the Union passed. There was one major problem with that promise: King George III was anti-Catholic. He “refused to allow him [Pitt] to redeem the Union pledge of granting Catholic emancipation.”<sup>20</sup> So, in the end, both sides agreed to the Union, but only the Protestants got what they wanted, and it was their second choice, direct British control. The Catholics still did not have their rights and now the matter was up to the Protestant Imperial parliament which could conveniently ignore Ireland. Somehow the Irish had to get their attention and convince them to grant emancipation.

### **The Liberator and Associates**

This was a great challenge for Ireland. How to convince the British to give them their rights that they had been promised? The man who took up this challenge was Daniel O’Connell. He was a Catholic from County Kerry, Munster, and spent the latter portion of his life working on attaining Catholic emancipation and Repeal of the Union. To do so he created the Catholic Association and later the Repeal Association in order to organize the Irish to attain their goals. Both Associations were built in the same way: full members had rather high fees to join, but anyone could be an associate member for a shilling a month. Though this was “a small amount of money,” when millions of peasants contributed, “the result was thousands of pounds in the association treasury.”<sup>21</sup> This low fee enabled the approximately six million Catholic Irishmen<sup>22</sup> to be a part of the Association even with their extremely low salaries. In the process O’Connell

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<sup>20</sup> O’Connell, *A Memoir on Ireland Native and Saxon*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Hachey and McCaffrey, *The Irish Experience Since 1800: A Concise History*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

awakened the Irish Catholics to the idea that they were a nation, and gave them goals beyond their own survival for the first time in their history.<sup>23</sup>

An important colleague of O’Connell during his later work on Repeal was William Joseph O’Neill Daunt, from County Cork. WJ Daunt was born a Protestant, but fairly early in his life converted to Catholicism, which was very unusual for a landlord to do, and his reasons are unclear, even in his own diary. According to the Daunt biography in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, he ‘was close to [Daniel] O’Connell during the repeal leader’s declining years in 1844–7’<sup>24</sup> and this is reflected in his diary as he often references O’Connell and compares his own thoughts to O’Connell’s. While WJ Daunt was not politically active in the time of the Catholic Association, he worked with O’Connell in the Repeal Association and even served as his secretary while O’Connell was mayor of Dublin. Though Daunt became less politically involved after O’Connell’s death, he continued some of his work, specifically working towards the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, which was achieved in large part due to Daunt’s work, in 1869.<sup>25</sup>

### **Obstacles to O’Connell**

One of O’Connell’s great obstacles to achieving Catholic emancipation was the anti-Catholic attitude prevailing in Great Britain. This bias had grown during centuries of wars with the Catholic nations of France and Spain, although this was changing as Enlightenment ideas filtered in. O’Connell had to work against the British opposition to his work and, at the same time, convince them to grant emancipation. Since the British stood in O’Connell’s way, he had to

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<sup>23</sup> Raymond Moley, *Daniel O’Connell: Nationalism Without Violence*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), xv.

<sup>24</sup> D.M. Cregier, “William Joseph O’Neill Daunt (1807-1894),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006), <http://www.oxforddnb.com.library.ucc.ie/view/article/51149?docPos=2>. (accessed October 3, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



find a way to counter their power in Ireland. He realized that the best way to do this was to organize the Irish Catholics: if about six million Irishmen demanded emancipation, the British would have to listen. But this was no easy task; O'Connell had to find a way to communicate with a populace that was thinly spread across Ireland. The solution was to turn to the Catholic Church, whose administrative infrastructure and parish priests could be used to spread O'Connell's message to the illiterate masses of Ireland.

One of O'Connell's challenges in working with the Catholic Church was the fact that throughout its history, the Irish Church had not gotten involved in politics. Luckily for O'Connell, this was changing in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before the French Revolution, most Catholic clergy in Ireland had been trained in France, where, due to the absolutist nature of the state, they had been taught to abstain from politics.<sup>26</sup> But, during the French Revolution, the British decided to sponsor a seminary in Maynooth, Ireland in an attempt to prevent the spread of Revolutionary ideas to Ireland. One of the unintended consequences of this move was that the priests trained at Maynooth became "more conscious of their rights as British citizens"<sup>27</sup> which included the right to be active in politics. This, coupled with the fact that Catholic emancipation was directly relevant to Catholic priests<sup>28</sup>, allowed them to justify aiding O'Connell and his Catholic Association. These factors combined to push the Catholic Church to get involved in Irish politics for the first time, which was a great boon to O'Connell.

The main reason that the Catholic Church was useful to O'Connell politically was simple: the vast majority of the Irish people went to mass at a Catholic Church on Sundays. According to J.H. Whyte in his article on the influence of the Catholic Church in 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>26</sup> J. H. Whyte, "The Influence of the Catholic Clergy on Elections in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," *The English Historical Review* 75, no. 295 (April 1, 1960): 239–240, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/557354>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Irish elections “on the eight Sundays before the election a team of speakers, lay and clerical, toured the chapels and harangued the congregation after mass.”<sup>29</sup> Church was the ideal place to encourage the Irish Catholics to vote for someone other than their landlord’s favored candidate. It was already a gathering point and represented an important institution respected by the Irish. Therefore, the Catholic Church was likely the only institution that could make the Irish peasants vote against their landlords’ wishes.

On the whole the clergy were quite influential, but there were some issues and limitations with their aid. The clergy could not impose their views on their flocks, but “it seems to have been on the whole true that the Irish clergy could lead their people only in the direction that they wanted to go. ... A writer in the *Dublin Review* claimed that the clergy did not impose on their flocks any purely political conviction whatever’, but gave effect to ‘a conviction which exists quite independently of themselves’.”<sup>30</sup> So the clergy had to be careful in what people and ideas they backed. If they opposed what the people actually wanted, they could lose their influence in the future. The clergy were acutely aware of this. WJ Daunt wrote in his diary of an encounter with the Bishop of Ross who believed, according to Daunt, “that an unnational priest would be unpopular, and that the unpopularity of the man would be extended by his flock ‘to his principles’ – i.e. his religious principles.”<sup>31</sup> The bishop feared that the Irish Catholics would first turn against an anti-nationalist priest and then against the Church. Therefore the Church had to support the nationalist cause because their flocks did, if they did not, they risked losing their support.

This apparent inability of the clergy to persuade their flocks to change their views shows that the clergy’s greatest influence was that of aiding O’Connell in his attempts to politicize the

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 248–249.

<sup>31</sup> Daunt, *Diary of William Joseph O’Neill Daunt*, 608–609.

Irish Catholics, who heretofore had not been very political, due to their rather poor and widely scattered living conditions. The Catholic clergy were still very useful to O'Connell because they had a good understanding of the Catholic masses and could phrase his messages in ways that would make sense to the illiterate peasants by connecting the broad issues O'Connell spoke of to the local problems faced by the peasants. The clergy understood the Catholic peasants' issues because they lived with or near their flocks and most of them had been tenant farmers, like much of their flocks, before attending seminary.<sup>32</sup>

Though O'Connell was Catholic and was working with the Catholic Church in Ireland to run the campaign for Catholic emancipation, he still had to reassure Catholic Church officials in Rome that he wanted Ireland to be a part of the Catholic community. In May 1842 he wrote a letter to an Irish clergyman in Rome that he did "not wish to have the relations of Ireland with the Holy See relaxed or diminished" and that "no man can be more attached to the centre than I am. No man can be more entirely convinced that the stability of the faith depends on the submission to and union with the Holy See."<sup>33</sup> As a Catholic O'Connell wanted to maintain Ireland's ties to the Vatican, and since he needed the Catholic Church's support for his emancipation campaign he had to reassure it that he did not want a secular Ireland. But this letter also shows that he did have strong ties to the Church itself, which would hurt him when he had to appeal to Protestants in his move for Repeal. Given that this letter is written to a member of the Catholic Church in Rome and specifically mentions the word 'faith', O'Connell is likely writing about maintaining religious ties, not political ones to the future Irish government he wished to establish. This corresponds with the Vatican's goals in Ireland. The Pope wanted to reassert authority over priests and general religious practice in Ireland after centuries of Protestant British

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 248–249.

<sup>33</sup> Dworkin, *Ireland and Britain, 1798-1922: An Anthology of Sources*, 38.

rule.<sup>34</sup> The papacy's main goals concerned the strength of Catholicism in Ireland, not the political events there.

The politicization of the Catholic Church was crucial to the success of O'Connell's campaign for emancipation. If he was to challenge British and Protestant power in Ireland he needed the assistance of the largest organization in Ireland not associated with the British state. The Catholic Church was very important to O'Connell as it "had unmatched resources of organisation and management in Ireland; once these were thrown into battle, it emerged, not only victorious on the issue which had roused it to action [emancipation], but also politically conscious and effective."<sup>35</sup> This power was necessary to overcome the history of Irish voters voting for whom their landlords' told them to, and it allowed O'Connell to reach the majority of the Irish people faster than if he had had to build an organization completely from scratch. By politicizing the Church, O'Connell gained a great ally for the cause of emancipation, but gaining that ally had great costs: the Protestants could no longer trust O'Connell because they saw him as primarily a Catholic, working for Catholic causes, not Irish ones.

### **Protestant Issues**

O'Connell had always been aware of the need to appeal to Protestants. He wanted to include them in his future vision for Ireland, but his work for Catholic emancipation made that more difficult. His work to unify the Catholic Church and the emancipation movement "helped to make the successive movements which he led more suspect than they might otherwise have been in Protestant circles."<sup>36</sup> Many Protestants feared Catholic rule, and this unification of purpose between O'Connell and the Catholic Church did nothing to assuage this fear. Some

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<sup>34</sup> James H. Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History, 1791-1891* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 72.

<sup>35</sup> MacDonagh, *Ireland: The Union and Its Aftermath*, 53.

<sup>36</sup> Kevin B. Nowlan, *The Politics of Repeal*, Studies in Irish History Second Series (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1975), 4.

Protestant ministers preached that the Catholic Church was evil and that all Protestants had the duty of converting Catholics. Another factor was an innate sense of superiority that the some Protestants gained through living in a Protestant country where their superiority was encoded in law.

Some Protestant ministers tried to instill hatred of the Catholics in their congregations by telling them that the Catholics were evil. In the early 1840's WJ Daunt wrote in his diary about a conversation he had on his way to Scotland with a young Scottish Presbyterian: "He [the boy] also says that a Romish priest cannot be a christian, because the Romish priests crucified our Saviour. On being asked who taught him this, he replied that it was the Rev. Mr. Lyle,"<sup>37</sup> who was his Presbyterian minister in Scotland. The boy then argued that the Bible gave proof to this, in the Book of Matthew, showing quite plainly "that the lad has been trained to hate the pope as a leading point of his religion."<sup>38</sup> The opinions of one Scottish lad do not reflect those of every Protestant in Britain, but they do reflect a strain of thought at the time. The British had been taught, at the very least, to distrust Catholics over the centuries and this Rev. Mr. Lyle seems to represent the extreme view in Britain. This notion of evil, non-Christian Catholics was likely more popular in Ulster than the rest of Britain. In Ulster the Anglican clergy led the anti-Catholic movement out of fear of losing their access to tithes<sup>39</sup>, a tax paid by all Irishmen, regardless of religion, to the Church of Ireland. They likely used similar rhetoric to the Rev. Mr. Lyle to get the attention of their parishioners and convince them to turn against their Catholic countrymen.

This idea that the Catholics were evil likely helped justify those Protestants who wanted to fight them to preserve the Protestant's privileged status. WJ Daunt wrote in one of his books

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<sup>37</sup> Daunt, *Diary of William Joseph O'Neill Daunt*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Suzanne T. Kingon, "Ulster Opposition to Catholic emancipation, 1828-9," *Irish Historical Studies* 34, no. 134 (November 1, 2004): 142, <http://illiad.ups.edu/illiad/illiad.dll?Action=10&Form=75&Value=170484>.

on Irish history about how he saw some Protestants: he thought that there were at least a few Protestants who “believed that they were divinely commissioned to dispel the gross darkness of Popery.” To accomplish this goal, these Protestants believed that God “authorized [them] to walk forth, wielding 'the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God,' and with which they were destined to encounter and overcome their enemies.”<sup>40</sup> For these men, Catholics were their enemies; they could not condone any action that would grant Catholics benefits. Though these views were not likely held by the majority of Irish Protestants, those who did were the most vocal, and Catholics, such as Daunt, were very much aware of them. This awareness influenced the way the Catholics debated how best to win Emancipation and later Repeal as they came to believe that most Protestants were against them. Those few Protestants who believed in the evils of Catholicism were likely the leading figures of the Orange Order, a Protestant organization meant to defend Protestantism, violently if necessary, and one of the major obstacles to O’Connell and the nationalists. One of O’Connell’s great challenges was to convince these Protestants that he meant them no harm, and that he wanted to work with them to create a better future for Ireland.

O’Connell believed that the Protestant sense of religious superiority had spread, due to the Penal Laws, to an overall sense of cultural and political supremacy, even in those Protestants who supported the Catholics. In an 1814 speech O’Connell recounts a letter he received from the Earl of Donoughmore, an Irish Protestant ally. In it, he saw an innate sense of dominance in the Earl, as a Protestant, over Catholics. He goes on to say: “perhaps they are themselves unconscious of this claimed superiority--indeed I believe that they perceive it not--being a matter of habit, and having arisen before reflection, and unaided by reasoning, it may well happen, and I believe it does happen, that our friends are themselves unaware of the judgement of inferiority

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<sup>40</sup> Daunt, *Ireland and Her Agitators*, 44.

which has been tacitly passed upon us.”<sup>41</sup> To O’Connell the Protestants had gained a sense of superiority over the Catholics just by living in Ireland. The Penal laws and other restrictions on Catholics made the Protestants ‘better’ than Catholics, so the Protestants internalized this advantage and came to believe that they were superior in such a subtle way that they did not even notice it. This sense of superiority made it difficult for Protestants to support the Catholics as they believed that it was natural for them to be dominant; even those who wanted to help the Catholics could be made hesitant by this belief.

It is not likely that all Protestants believed, innately, that they were superior to the Catholics and therefore had a ‘right’ to have more civil liberties, but there was a sense of entitlement held by many due to what is referred to as the Protestant ascendancy.<sup>42</sup> The ascendancy is the position of domination that the Protestants held in Ireland in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Protestants had certain rights and privileges that set them above their Catholic countrymen. Only Protestants had the right to hold political office, practice law, and own weapons. They also had unwritten privileges, such as “expectations of judicial favouritism” and a “special” relationship with their landlords that was better than many Catholics had with their landlords. These special rights and privileges were very important to some Protestants, especially the poorer ones, as it set them above their Catholic brethren, from whom there were very few other differences.<sup>43</sup> While these people may not have believed that they were innately superior, they had very good reasons to want to protect the Protestant ascendancy; as without it they would lose these benefits and have to share in the same poor conditions of the Catholics.

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<sup>41</sup> John O’Connell, ed., *The Life and Speeches of Daniel O’Connell, M.P.*, vol. II (Dublin: James Duffy, 1846), 126–127.

<sup>42</sup> Kingon, “Ulster Opposition to Catholic Emancipation, 1828-9,” 145.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

Higher class Protestants also feared Catholic rights, though instead of lowering them to near poverty, it would expose them to competition for high salaried jobs. In 1824 WJ Daunt was speaking to a Protestant who had been in the United Irishmen in 1797. When Daunt discussed Repeal with him, the man agreed that it would be nice for Ireland to have her own parliament “‘but then,’ he added, ‘the Papists are so numerous they would soon get the upper hand.’” When asked what was wrong with emancipation, he replied “‘to the effect that they would rival the Protestants in parliament, or he might be promoted to the bench, while the Protestant of inferior talent lost the race.’”<sup>44</sup> This man shows the effect of Protestant superiority on opinions of the political topics of the day. To this man it was acceptable that a Protestant should be able to attain an office when there was Catholic with better qualifications solely because he was Protestant. This man was willing to stand up for the right to have inferior men in positions of power and influence just because of their religion. The Protestant ascendancy was not to be risked even if it meant a better run Ireland. Though this quote was written in Daunt’s diary and not likely an exactly recollection of what the man said, this was the impression that Daunt had from talking to the man, which is almost as important. What the Catholics thought the Protestants thought of them changed how they behaved as it changed what they believed that they needed to do to succeed in gaining Repeal. To succeed the nationalists had to convince the Protestants that Catholics would be good citizens and were fit to run a government.

The great fear held by many Protestants of all classes was that the Catholics would never settle for just emancipation; they believed that O’Connell really had the ulterior motive of dominating Ireland. The Protestants of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century believed that all Catholic organizations had one goal: Catholic hegemony. No matter their initial aims, some Protestants

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<sup>44</sup> Daunt, *Ireland and Her Agitators*, 44–45.



could never trust the Catholics when they said they wanted to co-exist with Protestants.<sup>45</sup> For Protestants, Catholic emancipation was a step down a slippery slope: first emancipation, then Home Rule and Catholic tyranny<sup>46</sup>. It did not matter to them that O'Connell publicly proclaimed that he wanted a non-sectarian Ireland; they believed that he was just being careful with his words in order to try to persuade Protestants to join his cause.

The Protestants had some legitimate reasons to be wary of O'Connell's rhetoric. He did ultimately want Repeal of the Union, even though he might have told people that all he wanted was emancipation for Catholics, so that ultimate goal was always in the background for O'Connell. There was also the fact that he was regularly speaking in public where he had to be careful with his words because there were always Protestants listening. John O'Connell, one of Daniel's sons, wrote, in a collection of Daniel's speeches that he published, that there were often police note takers present at events where O'Connell spoke.<sup>47</sup> This meant that Daniel O'Connell had to be careful in what he said, because anything he said could get back to the police and potentially land him in prison. If the Protestants leaders were aware of this, which seems likely due to the relationship between Irish Protestants and the British government, they could always tell their supporters that O'Connell only supported co-existence in public as not to offend British officials, but he really wanted a Catholic state.

Some Protestants even argued that there was no reason for O'Connell's campaign: they believed that Irish Catholics had more rights under the British government and the Penal Laws than they would in a Catholic state. At Lisburn (near Belfast) a "Rev. James Stewart argued that 'Under our Protestant government they [the Catholics] actually enjoy more liberty than under any

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<sup>45</sup> Kingon, "Ulster Opposition to Catholic emancipation, 1828-9," 145.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>47</sup> O'Connell, *The Life and Speeches of Daniel O'Connell, M.P.*, II:131.

popish government whatever.”<sup>48</sup> The Protestant sense of superiority was not just at the individual level in the United Kingdom; they believed that Protestant states were superior to Catholic ones, largely due to religion. As a result many Protestants wanted to avoid a Catholic government at any cost to avoid being ruled by those who they believed were tyrannical and opposed to all civil liberties.

O’Connell had to counter these arguments and convince the Protestants of their falsity. But if this was a widespread belief, this would be especially difficult to do given the Protestant distrust of O’Connell. Luckily for O’Connell there were contemporary examples for Catholic liberality. Several Catholic states had passed tolerance laws by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, O’Connell cited these in a ‘letter to the Catholics of Ireland,’ published on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1821:

It was a Catholic state that first proclaimed and established liberty of conscience for all persuasions--the Catholic state of Maryland. It was a Catholic parliament that alone has granted full, free, unrestricted, and equalized emancipation to their Protestant fellow-countrymen--the Catholic Diet of Hungary. It was a Catholic king that afforded the last instance of a similar emancipation--the Catholic King of Bavaria. These instances of Catholic liberality cannot be made too familiar to the minds of honest Protestants, whose ambition it ought to be to give reciprocal proofs of liberality and Christian charity.<sup>49</sup>

There is clear evidence that some Catholic governments of the time were not repressive institutions, yet many Protestants continued to make the claim that the only way that they could defend their rights was by oppressing the Catholics. Some Protestants liked to make claims of moral superiority to Catholics based on the fact that Britain was a liberal government and the Catholic Church was a backwards and repressive organization. The number of Catholic governments that had granted emancipation to Protestants demonstrated that just because the Irish Catholics would be able to vote and hold office did not mean that the Protestants necessarily would lose their civil rights. O’Connell argued that Catholics only wanted their own civil rights, not to deprive the Protestants of theirs. Despite his arguments, fear of Catholic

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<sup>48</sup> Kingon, “Ulster Opposition to Catholic emancipation, 1828-9,” 147.

<sup>49</sup> O’Connell, *The Life and Speeches of Daniel O’Connell, M.P.*, II:303.

oppression remained central to Protestant opposition to Irish nationalists throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century as there was no guarantee that a Catholic majority in Ireland would behave as had Catholics in Maryland, Hungary and Bavaria.

### **The Non-Sectarian Goal**

O’Connell’s ultimate goal was to create an Ireland based on the liberality of these other Catholic states and the ideas of the Enlightenment: he wanted a non-sectarian Ireland where religion was only a matter between a person and his or her God. In an 1815 speech on emancipation O’Connell said: “we think the Catholic religion the most rationally consistent with the divine scheme of Christianity, and, therefore, all we ask is, that everybody should be left to his unbiased reason and judgment. If Protestants are equally sincere, why do they call the law, and the bribe, and the place, and the pension, in support of their doctrines? Why do they fortify themselves behind pains, penalties, and exclusions, and forfeitures?”<sup>50</sup> Both the Protestants and the Catholics believed that their interpretation of Christianity was the correct one, but O’Connell wondered why the British Anglicans needed restrictions on other branches of Christianity. He believed that the state should not interfere with religion; they should put no restrictions on a man’s decision on how he wished to worship God. All restrictions did was get people to convert for temporal reasons, not religious ones. If people have freedom of religion, they will choose the one they believe is spiritually best, not the one with the most earthly benefits.

Religious freedom was an ideal held by other members of O’Connell’s nationalist movement and was a major goal for them. Many in the United Kingdom at the time argued for the State having a role with the Church, but WJ Daunt rejected that claim and in 1865 he wrote in his diary that: “the State does, indeed, owe religion a duty, and that duty is to let religion alone.” To limit political power to only those of a certain creed hurts both State and Church.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., II:202.

Daunt thought that, “the state, by such an exclusive system, is deprived of the services of many an able intellect. The church becomes less spiritual and more worldly when the profession of her doctrines is made the condition of worldly promotion.”<sup>51</sup> Though Daunt wrote this in his diary nearly 20 years after O’Connell’s death he was, at the time, working on reaching O’Connell’s goal of Disestablishment (an official separation of church and state in Ireland), which was achieved in 1869. Daunt argued in his diary that both State and Church were hurt by their unity as they could no longer be distinguished from one another, and for them to both be at their most effective, they needed to be separate and distinct. If a state forbids men of a certain religion from participating in certain professions, like law and politics, it loses out on the best that that religion’s practitioners have to offer. Later in his diary, Daunt wondered why a government could allow a battle to “be lost because the man of greatest military talent does not believe in purgatory.”<sup>52</sup> This issue was particularly acute in Ireland where five-sixths of the population was disenfranchised. How many men of talent were the British denying themselves because of rules restricting Catholics? For Daunt and O’Connell, religion was a matter of personal belief, between a man and his God; government had no role telling him what to believe. But they also believed that the Church had no role in government as that harmed the Church’s role as a moral guide: how could men trust what the Church said if it was simply a tool of the government? If church and state were joined, one would not know if the Church advised an action because that was best under scripture or if it was best for the government.

The goal of the nationalists was to have a non-sectarian Ireland where Protestants and Catholics could live in peace. Daniel O’Connell summed up the two major aspects to this peace in a February 1815 speech “Let *us* also advocate our cause on the two great principles--first, that

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<sup>51</sup> Daunt, *Diary of William Joseph O’Neill Daunt*, 420.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.

of an eternal separation in spirituals between our Church and the state; secondly, that of *the eternal right to freedom of conscience*--a right which, I repeat it with pride and pleasure, would ... bury in oblivion the bloody orange flag of dissension in Ireland.”<sup>53</sup> For O’Connell, if Ireland had these two rights, the sectarian tension would cease to exist. Once the Protestants could see that they had nothing to fear from their Irish Catholic brethren, they would disband the Orangemen and focus on just being Irishmen. These two ideas were essential to O’Connell. He did not want a free Ireland unless every Irishman had these rights, both because it was just and because he believed it was the only way for all Irishmen to live in peace. The State had no role in the Church, and the Church had no role in the State.

Though O’Connell continually asserted that he wanted a non-sectarian state, the majority of Protestants never trusted him. During his later agitation for Repeal he always hoped for Protestant support, but it was not forthcoming. His appeals seemed to fall on deaf ears, after one such appeal, the leader of an Ulster reform group, Sharman Crawford “specifically repudiated O’Connell’s repeal agitation as tending ‘to divide the friends of liberty in Ireland and to separate us from our British countrymen.’”<sup>54</sup> As a result of his association with the Catholic Church, by the time of O’Connell’s Repeal agitation he had driven many Protestants to the British, and many of them no longer wanted a separate Ireland. The Protestants may no longer have cared whether the Catholics claimed they would treat them fairly was true. They were becoming British and did not want to separate from Britain.

### **Anti-Catholic (Church) Catholics**

It is true that O’Connell sought to disassociate himself enough from the Catholic Church to appease the Protestants, but that wasn’t the only reason for his stand on this issue. Though he

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<sup>53</sup> O’Connell, *The Life and Speeches of Daniel O’Connell, M.P.*, II:205.

<sup>54</sup> Nowlan, *The Politics of Repeal*, 22.

needed the Church's help in winning both emancipation and Repeal, he did not want it to have influence over the government he hoped to form. O'Connell was a faithful Catholic, but was not a supporter of the Papacy. He summed up his view of the institution and its potential for influence in an 1815 speech "I am sincerely a Catholic, but I am not a *Papist*. I deny the doctrine that the Pope has any temporal authority, directly or indirectly, in Ireland; we have all denied that authority on oath, and we would die to resist it. He cannot, therefore, be any party to the act of parliament we solicit, *nor shall any act of parliament regulate our faith of conscience.*"<sup>55</sup> To O'Connell, the Pope only had authority on religious matters and absolutely none on the matters of governance; moreover O'Connell would fight to maintain that separation. The Protestants in Ireland feared the Pope's influence in a Catholic majority country, and it was likely that the Catholic Church looked forward to having more influence in Ireland. Though O'Connell, the leader of the Catholics, sided with the Protestants on limiting such Papal influence, this did little to reassure them. O'Connell said that under his leadership, an Irish parliament would forbid the passing of a law that was religious in nature in order to maintain peace with the Protestant minority.

The nationalists feared that the Catholic Church could turn the fervor that they had raised from nationalist aims to religious ones. WJ Daunt was worried about this at the centenary celebration of O'Connell's birth in 1875 where Archbishop Cullen only spoke of O'Connell's work towards Catholic emancipation. This was not enough for the people attending the speech, who began calling for a Home Ruler (the next generation of nationalists after O'Connell) to speak. Daunt commented:

Surely this should open Cullen's eyes if he be not incurably blind, to the monstrous fatuity of trying to crush our nationality under an avalanche of papistrial enthusiasm. I love my religion and I reverence the

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<sup>55</sup> O'Connell, *The Life and Speeches of Daniel O'Connell, M.P.*, II:178.

Pope; but I love Ireland passionately also, and I know her needs and her rights; and I know that Cullen is injuring the interests of religion by trying to thrust it forward as an obstacle to the pursuit of Home Rule.<sup>56</sup>

For Daunt, religion and nationality had to be kept apart. O'Connell's earlier work with the Catholic Church made Protestants question O'Connell's claim of a future non-sectarian state. The nationalists could not let the Church gain influence over the movement, because if they did, there would be no chance of getting a majority of Protestants to support Irish nationalism. As a result, the nationalists had to keep the Church at arm's length, and Archbishop Cullen seemingly trying to claim O'Connell as a religious figure did not help their cause and must have furthered Protestant suspicions of what the nationalists' motives truly were.

Another fear of the nationalists was that the British would try to influence the Catholic clergy, through Rome, to turn the Irish Catholics away from nationalism. In both the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the British tried to take over the payment of the clergy, though they were stopped each time. A British influence over the Church would be detrimental because, as WJ Daunt wrote in his diary, "religious prepossession and Irish nationality are so closely interwoven in the Irish mind, that if the catholic fidelity of the people could by any governmental devices be impaired, the political ingredient would be proportionably weakened. Some such speculation as this, has been always at the bottom of every English project for pensioning the Irish clergy."<sup>57</sup> The British occasionally tried to weaken Irish nationalism by trying to gain influence over the Catholic Church. Their hope was that they could undermine the nationalist movement due to its connection to the Catholic Church. For many Irishmen, Catholicism and nationalism were closely tied together, which was a challenge for O'Connell as he had to recognize this, yet also try to prevent it from becoming too closely bound and scare off the Protestants.

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<sup>56</sup> Daunt, *Diary of William Joseph O'Neill Daunt*, 566.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

Though the nationalists reiterated that they did not want official Catholic Church influence in a future Irish government, they could never reassure the Protestants. This was in large part due to the fact that Catholicism was tied to nationalism for many Irish Catholics; it would take another 150 years before these ideas could really separate. The Protestants saw the influence that the Catholic Church had on the people and that scared them. O'Connell could promise that the Pope would not have direct influence in the Irish government, but if his teachings were taught in Catholic Churches and schools across Ireland, they would end up in government. Catholic MPs would have a Catholic worldview and vote to follow their ideals and while there was no official oppression after Ireland gained its independence in 1922, the Catholic worldview had a major influence on the new Irish Free State. In the 1920's the Irish banned divorce, since it was illegal to Catholics, and it was not again allowed until the early 1990's. So both what O'Connell promised and what the Protestants feared came true: the Catholic Church had no official influence, but through its teachings it gained informal influence that restricted the rights of the people in Ireland.

### **Conclusion**

Daniel O'Connell had a major challenge on his hands in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when he was organizing the movement to win Catholic emancipation. He had to organize a populace which up to that point had really only been concerned about survival and had very little concept of unity except for the Catholic Church. He used the Church to help him build up his organization, but he had to be careful. Protestants were wary of O'Connell because he was a Catholic and they did not want to live under Catholic rule. Though there was evidence in both O'Connell speeches and on the Continent that Catholics could lead non-sectarian states, the Protestants never sided with the Catholics and opposed them all the way to partition in 1922.



O'Connell's dream of a non-sectarian Ireland faced an intractable obstacle in the Protestants and they never joined him or the general nationalist movement in great numbers.

All three groups that O'Connell was trying ally had goals that conflicted with each other. The Irish Catholics wanted their British civil rights, but that idea scared the Irish Protestants as they did not want to be a minority in 'their' country. Many of the wealthy Protestants wanted to rule Ireland while the lower classes did not want to live under Catholic control. The Catholic Church wanted to increase its influence in Ireland which also scared the Protestants and went against O'Connell's goals of a non-sectarian Ireland. Somehow O'Connell had to come up with a solution that appealed to all three of these groups and their mutually exclusive desires. While he succeeded in organizing the Catholic masses into an effective political entity and worked with the Catholic Church to do so, he was never able to appeal to more than a few Protestants. Through this organization, O'Connell created Catholic Irish nationalism. Where before O'Connell the Irish Catholics had only seen themselves as Catholic, they now saw themselves as Irish as well.<sup>58</sup> But this would cause problems for O'Connell's dream: it was not non-sectarian Irish nationalism, it was Catholic Irish nationalism. This inability to break apart nationalism and religion, as well as being unable to appeal to Protestants, doomed O'Connell to failure in his attempt to gain a mostly independent parliament for Ireland.

One of the reasons that O'Connell failed was the role the British played in Irish politics. From the Union until Irish independence in 1922, the British ran the island, though paid little attention to it unless the Irish forced them to. As result Britain was always several decades too late in granting the Irish what they wanted. Emancipation was promised in 1800, but was not granted until 1829. Disestablishment and land reform were only given in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century after decades of Irish agitation. This cycle caused more problems in the Anglo-Irish relationship;

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<sup>58</sup> MacDonagh, *Ireland: The Union and Its Aftermath*, 23.

the British saw that they gave the Irish what they wanted, but the Irish only saw the British relenting after years of sustained pressure from their organizations. This led to many in Britain coming to see the Irish as ungrateful, while the many Irish Catholics came to see the British as disinterested and uncaring, especially after the Famine. Ultimately the British would concede to grant the Irish their parliament in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but World War I interfered, so they delayed the transfer of power, leading to the Easter Rising as a small band of Irishmen had had enough of waiting for the British and decided to take action.

The strain of Irish nationalism that led to the Easter Rising, physical force nationalism, gained control over the national movement in Ireland after O'Connell's death. While there were always peaceful nationalists, O'Connell's failure to achieve Repeal by peaceful means gave a boost to the physical force nationalists whom he had suppressed by emphasizing the peaceful means by which he hoped to achieve Repeal. Modeling their activities after the 1798 United Irishmen rebellion, the physical force nationalists gradually took over as O'Connell's peaceful and parliamentary means continued to fail Ireland through the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Ultimately, physical force nationalism led to the Easter Rising in 1916, the 1921 War of Independence, and the 1922 Irish Civil War. Violence became the answer for the Irish, especially after its successes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This reliance on violence to attain political goals contributed to the Northern Irish 'Troubles' from the 1970's to the 1990's as the Catholics and Protestants in the North saw violent conflict as the best way to get their desired result. Only as this latest conflict died down did the extremes of Irish nationalist movement see the folly of using violence to resolve political issues.

O'Connell failed in part because he was ahead of his time. The Ireland he wanted was similar to the one that exists today. The modern Ireland is non-sectarian to an extent. As

evidence of Catholic priests' abuse of children has come to light in the last 20 years, many Irishmen have been driven away from the Catholic Church. While the Church's reaction to the scandal has driven people away, new ideas, such as secularism, have spread to Ireland from the Continent after it joined the European Community. Though modern Irish culture and society is still heavily influenced by the Catholic Church (for example: the schools are still run by the various churches), the people, especially the younger generations, are less attached to the Church than their ancestors. 150 years ago O'Connell could not separate Catholic identity from Irish identity; they were one and the same, but now, those ideas are separating, Ireland is a secularizing, emerging non-sectarian state.

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