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The Churches as Ethnoreligious Agents:

Interchurch Marriage and Childrearing in Ireland

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I. Introduction

Where two faiths one pillow share,
certainly the devil's there.
Dutch Proverb (Heron, 1977)

Thesis

Ireland is often cited as a prime example of ethnoreligious conflict, with ongoing tensions between competing ethnoreligious identities continuing to shape the broader social fabric. In this context, religious denominations function ambiguously: post-Reformation churches have served both as catalysts for conflict and as engines for ecumenical peacebuilding. Over the past century, ethnoreligious identities have been particularly challenged by marriages that cross these sacralized boundaries. While peacebuilding efforts have not always led to significant results, recent initiatives by the churches to bridge ethnoreligious divides and embrace cross-community unions demonstrate a growing commitment to overcoming these tensions. There is an important ambiguity to note in this. Whilst, in relation to mixed marriages, churches have undoubtedly contributed to rigidly exclusive understandings of conflicted community and religious identities, churches have, at the same time, often supported more nuanced stances in support of reconciliation and ecumenism. This thesis aims to explore the ambiguity within Church policies and identify potential pathways for dismantling rigid identity constructs that negatively affect interchurch marriages in Ireland

Research Rationale

As Ireland transitioned into the modern age, the Roman Catholic Church and major Protestant churches functioned as ethnoreligious agents, playing key roles in shaping communal and ethnic boundaries. They treated interchurch marriage as a battleground for reinforcing these separations. Ethnoreligious identity refers to the blending of ethnic belonging with affiliation to a dominant religious group, a connection that is often socially normalized. This concept is explored in greater depth in the following section titled "Ethnoreligious Identity."

In this dissertation, I examine how the churches, both intentionally and unintentionally, contributed to the creation of modern localized identity politics, communal segregation, and broader divisions in Ireland. I explore the challenges these divisions pose for both secular and practicing cross-community families, particularly those formed through interchurch marriage and cross-community childrearing. My research draws on a multidisciplinary approach, including Irish politics, history, social policy, social psychology, state law, and church law. This broad perspective is crucial to understanding the development of contemporary notions of interchurch and cross-community marriage, relationships, and childrearing.

"Mixed marriages," as they are commonly referred to, have long been a source of tension in Ireland, historically discouraged by both Protestant and Catholic churches. Beyond the direct condemnation of such unions by the churches, the debate occurs against a backdrop of sectarian conflict. In both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, religious divides are often constructed as ethnic markers, reinforcing a hierarchy of legitimacy based on native or "God-given" status. These ethnic constructions have persisted and have arguably been strengthened through the processes of secularization. Rooted in the colonial settler project and the English Reformation, religion has served as both a political and ethnic marker. For example, Protestantism in Ireland has been "associated with a colonizing alien force," while Catholicism symbolizes "dispossession" (Jameson, 2014).

From the soft border dividing the island to the longstanding ethnoreligious conflict in the North, as well as persistent segregation in housing and education, significant divisions continue to shape Ireland. The tensions surrounding mixed marriages are not merely theological; they are deeply rooted in sociopolitical identities and allegiances. As David Jameson argues in *The Religious Upbringing of Children in 'Mixed Marriages': The Evolution of Irish Law*, religion and politics in Ireland have long been intertwined, with such relationships crossing both social and political boundaries (Jameson, 2014). In Northern Ireland, much of the sociopolitical landscape is defined by two competing nationalisms, where identity is often reduced to two opposing ethnoreligious categories—green versus orange, Irish versus British, Catholic versus Protestant. These identities play a pivotal role in advancing the goals of competing nationalisms, which promise either the unification of Ireland or continued loyalty to the United Kingdom.

Economic, political, and land-owning concerns have long underpinned hostility toward mixed marriages in Ireland. Historically, marriage was primarily a financial contract focused on inheritance and land rights, in stark contrast to the modern conception of marriage as a celebration of love against all odds. As a result, public anxieties about marriage today are still closely tied to concerns over control of land, finances, and inheritance. Public debates continue to focus on how interchurch marriages might affect conversion rates and population statistics, which, in turn, influence the relative sizes of Catholic and Protestant populations. These demographic factors are seen as crucial to the future of Northern Ireland's peace process and the broader Irish national question. For example, the Good Friday Agreement directly ties population size to the potential outcome of the political struggle, suggesting that demographic shifts could determine whether Northern Ireland moves toward unification or remains part of the United Kingdom. Moreover, modern political structures are largely based on majority rule, a system that often marginalizes minorities and suppresses their claims to self-determination and communal autonomy. Consequently, tensions over population size continue to simmer: Protestants fear becoming a minority, while Catholics anticipate regaining political power, expecting to become the growing majority in the near future.

In Northern Ireland, religious and political divisions are primarily defined by the Protestant and Catholic communities. The Good Friday Agreement, which serves as the framework for the region's governance, stipulates that any change in sovereignty should be decided by a majority vote. As a result, demographic shifts—particularly in the balance between Protestant and Catholic populations—carry significant political weight. Both communities closely monitor these changes, as they could influence decisions about Northern Ireland’s future. While some individuals in Northern Ireland adopt neutral or post-ethnic positions, the majority of Protestant and Catholic voters remain aligned with ethnoreligious nationalist goals (Elliott, 2000).

Ireland is divided into four provinces: Ulster, Connacht, Leinster, and Munster. Following the 1921 partition, most of Ulster became part of Northern Ireland, which quickly became a focal point for sectarian conflict, particularly between Protestant and Catholic populations. Ulster, the northernmost province, consists of nine counties, six of which became part of Northern Ireland. In the 1911 census, 79 percent of Ulster’s population lived in the counties that later formed Northern Ireland, making it a key region of sectarian strife during the Troubles (Elliott, 2000).

The population dynamics of Ulster provide crucial context for understanding sectarian tensions in Northern Ireland. Ulster includes the six counties of Northern Ireland: Tyrone, Fermanagh, Derry, Armagh, Antrim, and Down. Among these, four counties—Tyrone, Fermanagh, Derry, and Armagh—have Catholic majorities, while Antrim and Down are predominantly Protestant. Belfast, the capital and largest city, is located in County Antrim. Catholic-majority areas include parts of Tyrone, Fermanagh, Derry, Newry in Armagh, and the southern coast of Down. Protestant-majority areas are concentrated in Antrim and parts of Down. Additionally, areas with significant Catholic minorities, such as Belfast and the Lurgan-Portadown area in County Down, have played important roles in the region's political landscape (Elliott, 2000).

The ethnoreligious divide in Ireland deepened during the 1600s, when Scottish and English settlers arrived in Ulster as part of the Ulster Plantation, reinforcing the Protestant presence. This event significantly shifted the power balance, creating a Protestant majority that would shape Northern Ireland's identity for centuries. By the eighteenth century, the Catholic population in Ulster had steadily declined, with major drops in counties like Derry and Antrim. However, the Catholic population remained higher in the Republic of Ireland. For example, in 1700, Catholics made up just 24 percent of Derry's population, 43 percent of Donegal's, and only 19 percent of Antrim's. As the twentieth century approached, demographic patterns began to shift.

A key demographic shift contributing to ongoing tensions is the growing Catholic population, largely driven by higher fertility rates rather than mixed marriages. Catholic families tend to have more children than their Protestant counterparts, significantly altering the region's demographic makeup (Elliott, 2000). This growth has profound implications for Northern Ireland's political and social landscape, particularly given the emphasis on majority rule when determining the region's future. The increasing Catholic population raises important questions about the possibility of a unification referendum and the potential for shifts in political power.

In the 20th century, according to analysis of the 1911 census, although Irish Catholics had the highest fertility rate, they also had the highest child mortality rate, in part due to socioeconomic factors. These factors were particularly evident in the poorer Catholic communities, where access to healthcare and better living conditions were more limited, exacerbating the overall mortality rates (Pozzi, L et al., 2024). By 1911, the Protestant majority in Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, began to be challenged by a growing Catholic population. In the 1990s, Catholics in Belfast made up a significant portion of the population, and in some areas, they formed a majority. Despite ongoing sectarian divisions, these demographic changes raised important questions about Northern Ireland's future, especially regarding the balance of power between Protestants and Catholics and the potential for reunification with the Republic of Ireland (Elliott, 2000).

The growth of the Catholic population has been also aided by the rise of mixed marriages, which were historically rare in Northern Ireland. In the early twentieth century, mixed marriages made up just 0.8 percent of all marriages, with the rate slightly higher in areas with fewer Protestants. Research by A. Fernihough, C. Ó'Gráda, and B.M. Walsh in *Intermarriage in a Divided Society: Ireland a Century Ago* found that mixed marriages were more common when at least one partner was Protestant, though they remained uncommon in Ulster due to sectarian tensions and local marriage market conditions (Fernihough et al., 2015).

In Ulster, where Protestants were the majority, mixed marriages were particularly rare. The strong sectarian divide and the scarcity of Protestant partners discouraged intermarriage. However, outside of Ulster, where Protestants were in the minority, mixed marriages became more common. For example, in Munster, where Protestants were fewer, mixed marriages involving at least one Protestant reached 14 percent, and in Leinster, including Dublin, mixed marriages exceeded 1.5 percent after the 1860s. By the early twentieth century, the rate of mixed marriages declined across Ireland but fluctuated between 8 and 12 percent in areas with larger Protestant populations (Elliott, 2000).

In Ulster, the children of mixed marriages were more likely to be raised Protestant if their father was Protestant, though Catholic mothers often raised their children in the Catholic faith. This trend can be attributed to the strong role women played in transmitting religious identity, as Catholic women were more likely to attend church regularly. As a result, children from mixed marriages, especially those with Catholic mothers, were more likely to be raised Catholic, although regional differences existed (Elliott, 2000).

Interestingly, mixed marriages in Ulster typically involved partners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Protestant women, in particular, were more likely to marry

Catholic men of similar or lower social standing. This contrasts with mixed marriages in the Republic of Ireland, where Catholic women who married Protestant men often had higher social status. This difference in marriage patterns reflected broader social and economic divides, exacerbated by the social and economic discrimination faced by Catholics in Ulster. The dynamics of mixed marriages were significantly influenced by these divides, impacting both the political and social status of the partners involved (Elliott, 2000).

In terms of fertility, Catholic families in pre-partition Ireland typically had more children than Protestant families. This "marital fertility gap" was especially pronounced in Ulster, where mixed marriage couples tended to have smaller families due to social stigmas and the alienation they faced. In contrast, outside of Ulster, mixed marriage couples often followed the fertility patterns of the broader Catholic population, with larger families and children more likely to be raised Catholic.

These demographic patterns are critical for understanding the sectarian tensions that have persisted in Northern Ireland. The growth of the Catholic population, fueled by higher fertility rates, combined with the rise in mixed marriages and shifting dynamics in Ulster, have all contributed to ongoing political and social challenges. The decline in Protestant numbers, particularly in the Republic of Ireland, has sparked fears among Northern Protestants about the potential absorption of Protestant identity into the Catholic majority. These demographic shifts have not only reshaped the political landscape but also intensified sectarian tensions, particularly in the context of population balance and the possibility of a future unification referendum (Elliott, 2000).

The evolving population dynamics in Northern Ireland—especially the growing Catholic population and the role of mixed marriages—have significant political and cultural consequences. The continued emphasis on majority rule and the shifting balance between Protestant and Catholic communities suggest that sectarian divides will persist, influencing the region's future. As these trends unfold, the changing power dynamics between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland will remain central to discussions about sovereignty, identity, and the future of the region.

Through an ethnoreligious lens, "Protestant" and "Catholic" are often seen as incompatible, reactionary sociopolitical identities. Interchurch partnerships and their children are thus viewed as threats to the purity of these identities and to political legitimacy. The existence of interchurch children challenges the validity of this cultural binarism, undermining the notion that the two communities are so distinct that cohesion is impossible. Interchurch children, and the marriages that produce them, must navigate a divided society that feels threatened by their ability to cross established barriers. As a result, as will be explored further, the religious upbringing of interchurch children becomes one of the most contentious issues in the mixed-marriage debate.

Protestant anxieties and the emergence of a pan-Protestant identity in Ulster can be traced back to the public moral panic surrounding the infamous McCann Case, which, albeit somewhat inaccurately, brought the *Ne Temere* decree (1907) into the spotlight. In the Republic of Ireland, tensions surrounding mixed marriages are often linked to the historically low number of southern Protestants, a situation shaped by laws, policies, and the influence of the Catholic Church. One of the most infamous mixed-marriage cases in the Republic was the Fethard-on-Sea Boycott. These highly publicized legal cases, which focused on the role of churches in determining the religious identity of children—particularly the Catholic Church's role—have become key symbols of the ongoing Protestant apprehension toward mixed marriages.

Understanding the construction of Irish Catholic identity is essential to grasping nationalism and ethnoreligiosity on the island. To fully comprehend this, however, we must look beyond the early 1900s. As I will outline, Irish Catholic identity emerged as a distinct ethnoreligious group identity, consciously constructed and maintained by both religious and political elites. This identity serves to preserve the settler/native dichotomy, providing explicit political legitimacy. It has been shaped in direct response to Protestant historical dominance and British political self-interest. Similarly, pan-Protestant political activity has often been a reactive force, responding to Catholic political movements.

Despite ongoing tensions, the number of interchurch marriages in Northern Ireland has steadily increased. In the 1911 census, fewer than one percent of marriages in pre-partition Ireland were interchurch or "mixed." Between 1951 and 1971, the percentage rose to 2 percent, though a 1996 study by McGrath and Gordon found 7.7 percent. However, despite increasing instances of interchurch unions, the rate of mixed marriages in Northern Ireland is still lower than in the Republic of Ireland (Fernihough et al., 2015).

The ongoing evolution of ethnoreligious divisions in Northern Ireland has been profoundly shaped by historical, sociopolitical, and demographic forces. Mixed marriages, while historically rare and contentious, provide a lens through which to explore the broader sectarian tensions that continue to define the region. The growing Catholic population, shifting fertility rates, and the rise of interchurch unions have all played pivotal roles in challenging traditional ethnoreligious boundaries. While these changes present opportunities for reconciliation and greater cross-community interaction, they also highlight the deeply entrenched fears and insecurities that continue to divide Protestant and Catholic communities. The outcome of these demographic shifts will have lasting implications for Northern Ireland's future, particularly as questions of sovereignty and political identity remain unresolved. Understanding these dynamics is essential for both grasping the complexities of Irish nationalisms and addressing the challenges posed by sectarianism in a rapidly changing world.

II. Methodology:

In this research, I have outlined a historical timeline of the "mixed marriage" debate in pre-partition Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland, providing an overview of both civil and academic discourse. While my primary focus is on the early twentieth century to the present, I also include a pre-modern historical context to offer essential background information for understanding modern and post-modern sociopolitical attitudes. This context also informs the Catholic civil rights movement and the historical caste structure that temporarily diminished the power of the Irish Catholic Church, once regarded as a bastion of the Western Church.

I analyze the impact of the Troubles through quantitative data, case studies, and relevant theories. A key aspect of my research is the exploration of "post-conflict" interchurch marriages, partnerships, and the experiences of children born from such unions. This research is desk-based and theory-driven, aiming to contribute to post-conflict discourse by highlighting phenomena that hinder social fluidity, such as social barriers and the binarism of ethnoreligious identity in Ireland.

By conceptualizing and theorizing the mixed-marriage debate within its sociohistorical context, I treat it as an ethnoreligious phenomenon. In constructing a layered account of ethnoreligiosity and church policy, I allow prominent commentators and church authorities to define the phenomenon largely in their own words. In doing so, I aim to provide the reader with what Geertz might call a "thick description" of the topic, detailing both my findings and the way this issue has been studied to date.

III. Literature Review:

On the topic of ethnoreligiosity and competing nationalisms, my primary sources include the work of Vyacheslav Karpov, Elena Lisoyskaya, and David Barry in their article *"Ethnodoxy: How Popular Ideologies Fuse Religious and Ethnic Identities"*; Eoin de Bhaldraithe's article *"Mixed Marriages and Irish Politics: The Effect of Ne Temere"*; Tom Inglis's book *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*; Terence P. McCaughey's *Memory and Redemption: Church, Politics, and Prophetic Theology in Ireland*; Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*; Anthony D. Smith's *Chosen Peoples*; Richard Niebuhr's *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*; and Jeffrey R. Seul's article *"'Ours Is the Way of God:' Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict."*

Vyacheslav Karpov, Elena Lisoyskaya, and David Barry's article *"Ethnodoxy: How Popular Ideologies Fuse Religious and Ethnic Identities"* has been particularly influential in my research. Their breakdown of the macro, micro, and meso features of ethnoreligiosity offers a unique framework that bridges social theories on ethnicity and religion—especially the fusion of these identities through belief systems. They also include Ireland as a key case study, highlighting the phenomenon of ethnoreligiosity in Ireland alongside other nations.

Their work challenges the perception of ethnoreligiosity as a unique or isolated occurrence, arguing instead that it is a widespread phenomenon. For instance, just as Irish Catholicism has fused with a broader ethnoreligious group identity, so too have Polish Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, Nordic Lutheranism, and Scottish Presbyterianism. These authors highlight the normalization of such group affiliations, which become so ingrained in social structures that individuals who do not conflate ethnicity and religion are often viewed as atypical or, in extreme cases, traitors.

At the macro level, Karpov, Lisoyskaya, and Barry define ethnoreligiosity through large social ideologies, institutions, and functions that bind ethnicity and religion. At the micro level, they focus on identity politics and the social psychology of social identity theory.

The meso level, in their framework, involves belief systems that contribute to the normalization of ethnoreligiosity. They also note that while literature on ethnoreligiosity is sparse, the impact of this phenomenon on group identity and conflict is undeniable. Their work provides a comprehensive and widespread analysis of ethnoreligiosity, filling a significant gap in the literature (Karpov et al., 2012).

Eoin de Bhaldraithe's "Mixed Marriages and Irish Politics: The Effect of Ne Temere" is frequently cited to explain the requirements of Catholic divine law, particularly the impact of the Ne Temere decree. Although de Bhaldraithe is a monk of Bolton Abbey, a Cistercian monastery, he stands out for his relatively impartial documentation of the Ne Temere decree's influence in Ireland and its effect on Catholic-Protestant relations. His work is written with ecumenical intent, and he examines the legacy of canon law, highlighting its role in fostering and perpetuating ethnoreligious segregation through nuptial regulations. Drawing on his extensive knowledge of canonical law, Catholic history, and Irish Catholic identity, de Bhaldraithe offers a nuanced perspective on how these factors intersect and shape societal divisions (de Bhaldraithe, 1988).

Tom Inglis's *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* is not intended for a specialized, academic audience but rather for an engaged and interested lay readership. The book explores the shifting social image and declining power of the Catholic Church in Irish society, particularly its diminishing monopoly over moral authority in the state. Inglis argues that the Irish public gradually became aware of the Church's influence and how it came to dominate moral discourse in Ireland. Over the past decade, widespread scandals involving predatory and immoral behavior by priests have eroded public trust, leaving behind a more skeptical and less faithful Irish Catholicism. Inglis's work is an important resource for understanding the rise of secularism in Ireland and its impact on both identity and politics (Inglis, 1998).

Terence P. McCaughey's *Memory and Redemption: Church, Politics, and Prophetic Theology in Ireland* examines the Catholic-Protestant conflict through a critique of denominationalism, focusing on the roles of the churches. McCaughey begins by referencing Ernst Troeltsch's distinction between the Church and sect: the Church is described as "an institution endowed with grace and salvation," while the sect is defined as a "'voluntary society' bound together by a shared sense of 'new birth.'" This distinction frames the discussion of the churches' historical and contemporary roles in Irish society and their involvement in denominational conflicts (McCaughey, 1993).

In *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity,* Anthony D. Smith argues that religious and spiritual beliefs continue to play a central role in shaping national identities, even in an increasingly secular and globalized world. Smith's goal is to unpack the historical reasons behind "often violent modern conflicts around issues of land, culture, religion, and politics." His analysis is valuable in understanding how religion fuels ethnonationalism, highlighting the ways in which both religious and seemingly post-religious factors contribute to the development of the modern nation-state. Smith also explores how religious origin stories have been pivotal in constructing group identities throughout history. As the title suggests, he emphasizes the foundational role of Abrahamic religion in defining peoplehood from its earliest stages (Smith, 2003).

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities,* provides profound insights into the nature and history of nations and nationalisms. Although his primary focus is not religion, Anderson's overarching analysis explores how group identity—whether on the scale of a nation or a church—is distinctly "imagined." I rely heavily on Anderson's definitions and framework for understanding the formation of the nation-state. He describes the decline of the "dynastic hierarchical realm" and the subsequent rise of horizontal camaraderie within the imagined community of the nation. This sense of shared identity, as Anderson notes, transcends societal class divisions and is instead anchored in a collective sense of origin, place, language, religion, and culture. He further explores how capitalism, particularly print-capitalism, played a crucial role in facilitating this imagining of the nation-state (Anderson, 1991).

In The Social Sources of Denominationalism, Richard Niebuhr makes it clear that he is not a "church historian or sociologist," but rather has sought to make an amateur's exploration of these fields productive for understanding the complexities of denominational divisions. Niebuhr effectively examines the social and ethnic factors that contribute to denominationalism and shape a deeply divided Christian public. Although the text was first published in 1929, it provides critical insights into the colonial nature of late Christianity and the division of churches. This is especially important for understanding the denominationally divided landscape of Ireland, where the religious framework and settler-colonial history continue to influence questions of culture and ethnic identity.

On the historical role of churches and religiously-coded civic authorities, my primary sources include *Mixed Marriages in Northern Ireland: Institutional Responses* by Valerie Morgan, Gillian Robinson, and Grace Fraser; Raymond M. Lee's article "Intermarriage, Conflict, and Social Control in Ireland—The Decree 'Ne Temere'"; and David Jameson's article "The Religious Upbringing of Children in 'Mixed Marriages': The Evolution of Irish Law."

Mixed Marriages in Northern Ireland: Institutional Responses focuses on placing personal experiences within a broader social context. The authors examine the actions and reactions of wider family groups, as well as major social institutions such as the churches and schools, to understand cultural trends, public attitudes, and policies. Published in the late 1990s, this work bridges the gap between clerical stances and personal narratives, documenting the cultural phenomena surrounding mixed marriage in Northern Ireland (Morgan et al., 1996).

Raymond M. Lee's article, *"Intermarriage, Conflict, and Social Control in Ireland—the Decree 'Ne Temere'"*, provides a historical account of Catholic decrees related to mixed marriages, culminating in the *Ne Temere* decree. Lee argues that the McCann Case, which followed the decree, solidified pan-Protestant identity and, by extension, supported the Loyalist cause. This moral panic within the Protestant community became a tool for subsequent Loyalist political action. Lee demonstrates how the media frenzy surrounding the McCann case and the Protestant fear of *Ne Temere* were, in essence, reflections of the same sectarian anxieties.

David Jameson's *"The Religious Upbringing of Children in 'Mixed Marriages': The Evolution of Irish Law"* provides an account of the decline of paternal supremacy in Ireland. Jameson focuses on five court cases—three predating the 1937 Irish Constitution and two following it. His stance, which he has defended in the *Irish Times*, challenges the argument that *Ne Temere* was the primary force behind the ethnoreligious divide in Ireland. While Jameson correctly demonstrates that the Catholic promises to raise children as Catholics predate the promulgation of *Ne Temere* in Ireland, he underplays the significant influence of the Catholic Church in the 1937 Constitution and in cases such as *Tilson*, which prioritized

Catholic prenuptial promises over paternal authority. Despite this, Jameson's work remains valuable in understanding the decline of paternal supremacy in Irish law (Jameson, 2014).

Regarding the ecumenical efforts of churches to address some of the damage caused by solidifying ethnoreligious boundaries, I cite Brian Lennon's article *"Interchurch Marriages: Torn Between Divided Churches"* and the Diocese of Ferns Reports. Brian Lennon offers insight into the character of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent reforms in the Catholic Church. His work is essential for understanding the influences that led to the *Matrimonia Mixta* decree, which relaxed Catholic regulations regarding the religious upbringing of children in mixed marriages (Lennon, 1980).

In 1986, the Diocese of Ferns released two reports on pastoral care for interchurch marriages. The second report, an instructional pamphlet for Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland clergy, provided guidance on procedures to alleviate problems when officiating mixed marriages between members of these two churches. These reports proved useful in delineating proactive approaches for churches and offering a theological foundation for the mixed-marriage debate (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

On the matter of ethnoreligious remnants in modernity, I reference the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA), including Paul McLaughlin, Director of Development at NIMMA (with whom I met to better understand the organization's work and challenges), and Jayme Reaves in the booklet *Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association 1974-2007: Celebrating the Work, Evaluating the Impact*; David Stevens' article *"A Profile of Northern Irish Religion"*; the brief article *"Mixed Marriages: Can the Problem Be Solved?"* from *Fortnight*; and *The Catholics of Ulster: A History* by Marianne Elliott, as well as A. Fernihough, C. Ó Grada, and B.M. Walsh's article *"Intermarriage in a Divided Society: Ireland a Century Ago."*

NIMMA provided me with their latest publications, from which I largely cite McLaughlin and Reaves. Paul McLaughlin's work offers a detailed account of mixed marriage in Northern Ireland, with a particular emphasis on personal narratives of mixed-marriage couples and their children. He explores the impact of social and institutional segregation on dual-identity families, offering a contemporary view of the ongoing mixed-marriage debate (McLaughlin, 2012). Jayme Reaves, in her analysis of declining religiosity in

Northern Ireland, clarifies the distinctions between relevant terms and their variable use in the literature (Reaves, 2008).

In *"A Profile of Northern Irish Religion,"* David Stevens uses statistical analysis to document cultural values and identity. He tracks the secularization of society, particularly among the youth and in urban areas, noting the decline in religious affiliation and the shifting Protestant and Catholic conceptions of the "Other." Stevens also examines mixed marriage rates, showing that about 40% of one partner in a mixed marriage changes their religious denomination, with half of the children raised as Catholics (Stevens, 1996). He documents the steady rise in mixed marriages since the 1950s, with a notable dip during the height of the Troubles (1968–1972). He highlights stronger opposition to mixed marriages among Protestants, particularly conservative Protestants, compared to Catholics, due to concerns over political power and demographic changes (Stevens, 1996).

The brief article *"Mixed Marriages: Can the Problem Be Solved?"* addresses the Roman Catholic Church's self-image as "the one true Church" and the resulting divine obligation for Catholics to raise children as Catholics. Protestants, lacking similar religious obligations, nonetheless worry about the weakening of their community through increasing mixed marriages. The article reflects fears about the shrinking Protestant population, both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland, due to the rise in Catholic numbers (Fortnight, 1975).

In *The Catholics of Ulster: A History*, Marianne Elliott presents an insightful examination of the shifting Catholic and Protestant populations in Ulster. She uses maps to show how, by the end of the Ulster Plantation, the Protestant population had grown, while the Catholic population declined. Elliott highlights how majority-minority relations continue to shape Northern Irish identity and the ongoing conflict (Elliott, 2000).

Lastly, the research in *"Intermarriage in a Divided Society: Ireland a Century Ago"* explores mixed marriages in Ireland prior to World War I. Through a detailed analysis of the 1911 census data, A. Fernihough, C. Ó Grada, and B.M. Walsh examine intermarriage across gender, class, and provincial divisions. This research provides a historical context for understanding the demographic and cultural anxieties surrounding mixed marriages, particularly in relation to fertility rates (Fernihough, Ó Grada, & Walsh, 2015).

IV. Terminology and Conceptual Clarity

First and foremost, there is the matter of accurate and wide-reaching terminology. The term “mixed marriages” is contentious in the academic community; however, it remains the most used term by the general public, including—most critically—the couples themselves. The difficulties with the term are manifold. It can imply that marriage is the inevitable or natural outcome of cross-community unions, thereby neglecting the agency and intentionality of the individuals involved. Furthermore, it carries a legacy of biological essentialism, particularly in its historical use to describe racially “mixed” unions, a context laden with problematic racial and colonial connotations. While many people in Ireland come from backgrounds that are, technically, amalgamated—due to centuries of invasions, migrations, and cultural exchanges—the notion of communal purity, untainted by an Other, persists in the literature on cross-community marriage. This concept is especially relevant when considering the ways in which the churches have traditionally regulated marriage and how the state has allowed religious institutions to enforce these regulations (Reaves, 2008).

In the context of cross-community relationships, it is essential to distinguish between three main types: (1) where both partners are practicing, (2) where one partner is practicing, and (3) where neither partner is practicing. According to the Northern Irish Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA), only the first category qualifies as an “interchurch marriage”. NIMMA, founded in 1974, is a key organization that advocates for and protects these culturally and religiously mixed unions in Northern Ireland. The organization retains the term “mixed marriage” in its name, primarily due to its common usage among the public and its recognition in internet searches. In this dissertation, I will reserve the term “mixed marriage” exclusively for cases of marriage and will make a clear distinction between couples who are married and those who are not. The literature surrounding these unions employs a range of terms, including mixed, shared, cross-community, dual-heritage, interchurch, double-belonging, and integrated (Reaves, 2008). In my work, I will use the most applicable terminology based on the specific context, or more generally, the terminology favored by the sources I reference.

Additionally, throughout this dissertation, I shift between the terms Roman Catholic, Catholic, and Irish Catholic. The term Roman Catholic is used when discussing canon law and matters centered in the Vatican. Catholic is used more broadly to refer to interpersonal religious identity, especially when discussing individual beliefs and practices. The term Irish Catholic is reserved for discussions of the historical distinctions between the Catholic Church in Ireland and the wider Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the context of the formation and maintenance of a distinct Irish Catholic identity. This distinction is especially pertinent when considering the Catholic community's distancing from the European mainland following the imposition of the Penal Laws in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

V. Findings

Ethnoreligiosity and Conflict in Ireland

In conflicts around the world, religious identity is often used as a proxy for more complex disputes over land, culture, and political power. In this context, religion can become both a tool for exacerbating divisions and a means of defining ethnic belonging. A closer examination of Irish history reveals that the commonly accepted narrative of “indigenous” versus “planter” is oversimplified and frequently coded along religious lines, particularly with regard to the Catholic/Protestant divide.

It is important to note that the first significant settlements in Ireland were not concentrated in Ulster. The legacies of earlier invasions—the Anglo-Normans, the Vikings, and others—have left lasting marks on the island’s linguistic, cultural, and religious landscape. What stands out most is how religion came to define ethnic belonging, especially during key historical moments. For example, the Catholic Old English settlers of The Pale (the area around Dublin) began to identify as Irish, particularly in response to the political and religious pressures exerted by the English Crown after the Protestant Reformation. In contrast, during the Ulster Plantation, the religious distinction between Protestant and Catholic was used to demarcate who was considered "indigenous" and who was a "planter," irrespective of the actual origins or histories of the individuals involved (Gribben, 2021).

In *Intermarriage in fifteenth-century Ireland: The English and Irish in the “four obedient shires”*, Booker 2013 examines the widespread phenomenon of intermarriage between English settlers and Irish individuals in late medieval Ireland, particularly in the four counties of Dublin, Meath, Louth, and Kildare. This trend, often associated with the elite, was also common among English merchants, townspeople, gentry, and small landowners. While records suggest the prevalence of intermarriage, Booker argues that these marriages likely occurred even more frequently than the documentation shows. By the second half of the fifteenth century, the dynamics of intermarriage between English and Irish people had become an integral part of colonial society (Booker, 2013).

One of the core issues discussed by Booker is the colonial community's insistence on determining ethnicity based solely on descent, which led to the frequent labeling of people as 'Irish' based on their ancestors' heritage, regardless of their current status or relationships. For instance, in the case of John Ardagh and John Cadegan, both were subject to an inquisition that questioned their 'Englishness' due to the supposed Irishness of their bloodlines. However, after requesting a second inquiry, the verdict confirmed that their ancestors were English, and not Irish as originally assumed, leading to the expunging of the original inquisition's findings and a decree that they were not to be labeled 'Irish' in the future. This case illustrates how ethnic identity, based on colonial ideas of 'blood' and 'lineage,' played a critical role in determining social standing and legal status (Booker, 2013).

Other historical figures, such as Adam Nores of Drogheda (1384), Richard Kevenok of Lusk (1465), and Davy Grenan, vicar of Timoole, County Meath (1476), underwent similar inquiries regarding their ancestry. In these cases, while their surnames appeared Irish (e.g., Kevenok resembling 'Caomhánach' and Grenan echoing 'Ó Grianáin'), the verdicts generally determined that they were of English descent, highlighting the colonial fixation on patrilineal heritage rather than the individual's cultural practices or local ties. Booker 2013 points out that the jurors, despite the superficial Irish connections of the surnames, found ways to secure favorable rulings for these individuals, suggesting social or political pressures at play (Booker, 2013).

Booker also analyzes the social stigma surrounding 'Irish blood,' as exemplified in a 1467 statute enacted by the Irish parliament. The statute condemned Laurence Obogan, an Irishman of the Ó Bogáin family, for allegedly betraying English secrets due to his Irish descent. Despite being the appointed sub-constable of Ballymore Castle, Obogan was replaced by an Englishman because of the perception that his Irish heritage made him a liability. This substantiates the colonial emphasis on Englishness as an essential characteristic for those in positions of power and trust (Booker, 2013).

Intermarriage, while socially discouraged and legally constrained, was nonetheless a recurring feature in late medieval Ireland. Booker provides several instances of land confiscations linked to intermarriage. For example, the lands of Elizabeth la Veel/Calf, who married Art Mac Murchadha Caomhánach, were confiscated around 1390 after their union, as Mac Murchadha, a prominent Irish figure, was viewed as a threat to the colony's territorial integrity. These lands were only restored after Mac Murchadha's submission to Richard II.

Similarly, Katherine Byron's marriage to Esmond Deshe (Déise), an Irishman, led to the seizure of her lands in 1472/3 by the Irish parliament, though this decision was reversed in 1474, likely due to political considerations. The confiscation of land, particularly for English women who married Irish men, was a significant legal and economic punishment. However, English men who married Irish women often retained their lands, as property typically passed through paternal lines. For instance, Edward Nugent of Ballebrannagh's marriage to an Irish woman, Owyn Niny Molloy, led to the confiscation of his property in 1520, though this decision was also later reversed (Booker, 2013).

Booker ultimately concludes that the English-Irish intermarriages led to the gradual erosion of clear ethnic boundaries, especially in the four counties of Dublin, Meath, Louth, and Kildare, which had once been seen as the most English parts of Ireland. Despite the colonial authorities' repeated efforts to reinforce the distinction between the two groups, intermarriage between the English settlers and the Irish became an important means of interaction, integration, and social accommodation. The hybrid society that emerged from these intermarriages was neither entirely English nor Irish but rather a complex, sometimes uneasy blend of both. Booker argues that the attempts to preserve the "Englishness" of the colony, especially through legal mechanisms and the regulation of marriages, ultimately failed as a result of the social realities on the ground (Booker, 2013).

The modern division is explicitly religiously coded and continues to shape identity politics in Ireland today. The policing of intermarriage between these religious and ethnic groups varied significantly depending on the sociohistorical context and the specific groups involved. The term "planter," for instance, was often used to describe Protestant settlers from England and Scotland during the early modern period, but this label did not always reflect an individual's ancestry or identity. Rather, it was a social construct tied to landownership, political loyalty, and—crucially—religious affiliation. Similarly, the term "indigenous" was increasingly defined along religious lines, reinforcing the role of religion in shaping not only personal identity but also broader social and political structures (Gribben, 2021).

The ongoing conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland is driven by exceptionally differing worldviews—distinct understandings of identity, belonging, and governance. Each group's historical experiences, shaped by religion, politics, and class dynamics, lead to contrasting visions of national loyalty, cultural heritage, and the distribution of power, particularly in terms of socio-economic status and political influence. While the widespread use of religion, and more specifically ethnoreligion, as a tool for nationalist agendas is evident, we should not assume that group identity is inherently exclusionary. Just as language and culture are not intrinsically exclusionary, ethnoreligious identity is not innately built on myths of superiority or shaped by perceived differences. However, the boundaries defined by ethnoreligious identities—particularly when shaped and maintained by religious and civil authorities—have proven to be contentious and tightly guarded.

Understanding how ethnoreligiosity shapes tensions in mixed marriages and cross-community relationships is crucial for comprehending the cultural, political, and social challenges faced by individuals in these unions. To explore the complexities of ethnoreligiosity, it is necessary to examine the dynamics that render these unions problematic, particularly from the perspectives of social, cultural, and political institutions. This section introduces key terms and frameworks from the literature to explain why the practice of ethnoreligious boundary preservation by church and state has made cross-community marriages and childrearing such a contentious issue.

Macro Level: Competing Nationalisms, Denominationalism, and Secularization

To understand the influence of ethnoreligiosity on mixed marriages, it is essential to first examine the macro-level dynamics of competing British and Irish nationalisms, the ethnic character of denominationalism, and the effects of secularization on religious identity. Drawing on the work of Vyacheslav Karpov, Elena Lisoyskaya, and David Barry, I will use their framework to discuss how ethnoreligiosity operates at various social levels—macro, micro, and meso—and how these ideologies shape experiences of identity, inclusion, and exclusion. In their 2012 article, *"Ethnodoxy: How Popular Ideologies Fuse Religious and Ethnic Identities"*, Karpov and colleagues introduce the term *ethnodoxy* to describe the ideological framework that links ethnicity and religion, challenging the idea that the connection between the two is "natural" or "unproblematic." They argue that these beliefs are socially constructed, shaped by collective histories and popular ideologies, and that they play a central role in both conflict and coexistence between different ethnoreligious groups.

Karpov et al. highlight how, in Ireland, Catholicism is not just a religion but also an ethnic marker for many individuals. As they note, "the majority happen to be Catholics, but may deem their Catholicism crucial and indispensable for their ethnic belonging" (Karpov et al., 2012). This intertwining of religious and ethnic identity, which many view as "natural," is the product of collectively held popular histories—narratives that shape group identities and fuel conflict. This dynamic is crucial for understanding how ethnoreligiosity, as a system of beliefs, contributes to the formation of social boundaries and the political actions of ethnoreligious groups.

Building on the work of scholars like Anthony D. Smith and Benedict Anderson, Karpov and his colleagues challenge the assumption that religion and ethnicity are always inseparably linked. They argue that these links are ideologically constructed and often serve as a foundation for social exclusion. Their introduction of the term *ethnodoxy* serves to describe a belief system that "rigidly links a group's ethnic identity to its dominant religion" and views other religions as harmful to the group's unity. This belief system is widespread and normalized, even in secularized societies, often leading to the marginalization of those who belong to different faiths or ethnicities. As the authors put it, "such belief systems fuel ethnoreligious conflict even in secularized societies" (Karpov et al., 2012).

Karpov and his colleagues also point out that, despite the widespread significance of these ideological conflations between faith and ethnicity, scholarly attention has been sparse. They call for more theoretical and conceptual work to address the ways in which religion and ethnicity intersect in popular imagination, as well as how these ideologies function in real-world social dynamics. Without such work, they argue, it is impossible to assess the scope, strength, and consequences of these ideologies across different societies and religious traditions.

In the Irish context, Karpov et al. note that "religion is often viewed as a defining characteristic of ethnic identity." The idea that religion shapes ethnic belonging aligns with the view of ethnic and national communities as defined by shared cultural traditions and mythologies. In Ireland, for instance, Catholicism is not only a religious affiliation but a cultural marker, intrinsically tied to national identity and history. The religious divide between Catholics and Protestants has been a critical factor in shaping both ethnic identities and nationalist movements in Ireland, particularly within the context of Northern Ireland.

Karpov et al. also highlight the challenge of examining both the macro and micro levels of ethnoreligiosity. The macro level concerns the societal and cultural conditions that enable the proliferation of ideologies conflating religion and ethnicity. The micro level refers to the social-psychological mechanisms that make such ideologies popular, drawing on social identity theory to explain how individuals internalize and act upon these ideologies. The meso level, in turn, involves the analysis of popular ideologies and their function within society.

To analyze how ethnoreligiosity is deeply connected to mixed marriage in Ireland, I must interrogate all levels: the macro-level dynamics of nationalism, secularization, and denominationalism; the micro-level dynamics through social identity theory; and the meso-level exploration of broader belief systems. Additionally, I draw on Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" to examine how collective identities—both religiously coded and ethnically defined—shape the experiences of individuals in mixed marriages. Anderson's framework illuminates how national and religious identities are constructed and how these identities influence the way people perceive themselves and others in a divided society.

Competing Nationalisms:

Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith are two key scholars who have significantly contributed to our understanding of the complex relationships between nationalism, ethnicity, and religiosity—all essential components of the concept of ethnoreligiosity on the macro scale. Both scholars offer critical insights that are central to the thesis developed here. Anderson, widely recognized for his work on ethnonationalism, especially in his seminal book *Imagined Communities*, explores the formation of the nation-state. He traces this process through a historical account of linguistic belonging, which he argues became standardized through print capitalism. This process, he explains, interacted with religious communities, reinforcing the division of societies along ethnonational lines, and contributing to imperial declines. In contrast, Smith emphasizes the role of religion, particularly biblical influences, in shaping ethnic and national narratives, identities, and foundations. He explores the early narratives of Scottish, Irish, English, and British origins, many of which are framed in religious terms, and addresses the role of religiosity in shaping empires.

There are notable gaps in both Anderson and Smith's work. While Anderson provides a foundational analysis of ethnonationalism, he does not fully address the intersectional aspects of the concept. For example, while he examines how elites benefit from upholding the nation-state, he does not fully explain why ordinary people might also see benefits in promoting nationalism or what psychological impulses might drive this. Anderson overlooks the role of class, social hierarchies, and power dynamics in shaping nationalism, particularly how elites use nationalism to maintain control. Anderson's theory also relies on a Eurocentric framework and emphasizes Western contexts. It might not be fully applicable to non-Western or post-colonial societies, where nationalism may take different forms.

On the other hand, Smith's account, particularly in *Chosen Peoples*, has its own limitations. While it provides valuable insights into the influence of the Old Testament within Christian societies, it focuses heavily on this influence and leaves little room to explore the impact of New Testament narratives. His work delves into notions of election and ethno-superiority in certain Christian sects, especially those tied to the biblical history of Israel and its adversaries. While his analysis of the Old Testament's role in Protestant and Catholic debates over doctrinal orthodoxy is thorough, the question of how the New Testament addresses or subverts notions of ethnic election remains largely unexplored in Smith's work.

Additionally, Smith does not address how these identities, ethnic and religious, are socially constructed and fluid rather than fixed categories. This essentialism leads to a deterministic view of national identity, which fails to account for the evolving nature of these identities in response to contemporary political and social processes. Smith's work is also Eurocentric in outlook, focusing primarily on European religious traditions without sufficiently considering whether the framework applies to non-Western or post-colonial contexts, where the relationship between religion, ethnicity, and national identity may differ significantly.

Like Anderson, Smith's analysis neglects the role of power dynamics in the formation and maintenance of national identities, particularly how elites manipulate nationalism to reinforce social hierarchies and consolidate power. Despite these critiques, both Anderson and Smith's work remains foundational in understanding nationalism, sparking further research and more nuanced approaches to the topic. Given that my research addresses power dynamics and caste structures directly and is framed within a Western context, their work has proven essential to my own analysis.

Building on Anderson's critiques, it is essential to first examine the foundation of the nation and its various forms of nationalism. In Northern Ireland, for example, national identity is rooted in competing nationalisms. Nationalisms are multidimensional, with the most significant elements being ethnic, religious, cultural, and political markers. To understand nationalism in this context, we must explore the emergence of the nation, the nation-state, and the nation-state's role in the modern, global conception of sovereignty.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson critiques the idea that we are witnessing the "end of the era of nationalism." He argues instead that "nation-ness" is the most universally legitimate value in contemporary political life. Anderson further explores how the concepts of nation, nationality, and nationalism—cultural constructs—are difficult to define, despite their widespread influence. He cites Hugh Seton-Watson, who contends that no "scientific definition" of the nation exists, and thus we must rely on working definitions of nation and nationalism (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson observes that each year, the United Nations admits new nation-states, while many older nations face challenges from sub-nationalisms within their borders. These sub-nationalisms, as he notes, aim to assert their national identity and dream of shedding their subordinate status. The post-Good Friday Agreement political structure in Northern Ireland exemplifies such sub-nationalisms, which are marked by opposing and contradictory identities, goals, and claims to national belonging.

Anderson further explains that nation-states, as we understand them today, command deep emotional legitimacy. However, their creation was an unplanned and multifaceted intersection of distinct historical forces. Nation-states developed in "modular" forms, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, and were capable of being transplanted across different social terrains, merging with diverse political and ideological constellations. The international field of nation-states emerged amidst the contradiction between their global applicability and their historic, place-based continuity (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson outlines three paradoxes that have confounded theorists of nationalism. The first paradox concerns the “objective modernity of nations” as viewed by modern historians, which contradicts the “subjective antiquity” understood by nationalists. The second paradox highlights the universal recognition of nationality in modernity—everyone should “have” a nationality—yet the tangible expressions of nationality are inevitably specific, making each nationality “sui generis.” The third paradox addresses the undeniable political power of nationalisms, which contrasts with their “philosophical poverty.” Anderson argues that nationalism is not a sociopolitical ideology like liberalism, Marxism, or fascism, but rather akin to kinship or religion, deeply tied to group identity.

In seeking a working definition of the nation, Anderson describes it as an “imagined political community”—imagined because, even in the smallest nations, most members will never meet or know one another. Yet, in the minds of all, there exists an image of shared communion. These imagined communities are sources of pride, and individuals are born into them by a combination of chance and compulsion. Anderson asserts that we are all aware of the “contingency and ineluctability” of our identity markers, such as genetics, gender, life era, and language (Anderson, 1991).

Ernest Gellner, cited by Anderson, argues that nationalism is not a process of self-consciousness emerging within pre-existing nations but rather an invention of nations where they did not previously exist. While Anderson agrees that nations are socially constructed, he critiques Gellner's view for overemphasizing nationalism as a "masquerade" or fabrication. Anderson contends that all communities larger than primordial villages are imagined, and that the authenticity of a community is less important than how it is imagined by its members (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson further explains that the nation is “imagined as limited,” because even in the largest nations, boundaries exist, and no nation sees itself as coextensive with humanity. The most extreme nationalists do not envision a world in which all people belong to their nation, unlike the way Christians once envisioned a universal Christian world. This distinction sets the modern nation-state apart from past imperial and connected religious communities, which sought universal membership. It also touches on the complex relationship between ethnicity and religious identity, a topic discussed by Smith, which will be explored further.

Anderson argues that the nation is imagined as sovereign because the concept of the nation-state arose as imperial structures declined, particularly as Enlightenment ideas and revolutionary movements challenged the legitimacy of “divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realms.” Sovereignty became a symbol of freedom during a time when established religions were confronted by the multiplicity of other faiths and their ontological and territorial claims. Anderson concludes, “nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.” This vision of freedom and territorial control is intertwined with the relationship between ethnicity and religiosity, reflecting how nationalism draws on both remnants of empire and religious narratives (Anderson, 1991).

Victor Jeleniewski Seidler, in *Embodying Identities*, further explores nationalism as a significant social-political theory of the 19th and 20th centuries. He argues that the nation-state, by claiming sovereignty, established terms of belonging that organized people to feel primary loyalty to the state. As a result, national identity became a central organizing principle for the modern world. However, in the 21st century, with increasing population movements, people are increasingly shaping transnational identities and complex senses of inheritance and belonging (Seidler, 2010). This shift from a focus on the nation-state to more fluid, transnational identities is crucial for understanding the evolving role of nationalism in the contemporary world.

As Anderson notes, the nation-state is imagined as a community because it is conceptualized as a “profound horizontal comradeship,” despite the reality of internal inequalities and exploitation. This sense of fraternity—this shared identity and common story—has driven millions to not only be “willing to kill” but to be “willing to die for such limited imaginings.” Anderson poses the central question: “What makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices?” (Anderson, 1991). This sense of fraternity and collective sacrifice, as Anderson describes, is not merely theoretical but is deeply embedded in the social and cultural practices of nation-states. In Northern Ireland, the memorialization of the dead and the display of sectarian murals offer a stark example of how national and religious identities are intertwined and perpetuated through acts of remembrance. What was once a symbol of conflict has evolved into a form of cultural preservation, highlighting how the nation's historical narrative is maintained, not just through politics, but through collective memory and identity.

In Northern Ireland, the memorialization of the dead and the display of sectarian murals have evolved into a significant component of the local tourism industry. These murals, originally born from the intense civil conflict that many once believed to be incompatible with the modern image of Western Europe, now attract visitors from around the world. Memorials to fallen individuals are frequently visited and adorned with flowers. Religious segregation in burial practices remains strong in Ireland, with Protestant and Catholic graveyards often kept separate, reflecting the deep ethnoreligious divides that continue to influence social practices. Jan Assmann, in *Religion and Cultural Memory*, refers to this as the "political cult of the dead," in which collective memory serves as a means of belonging for the living. Assmann explains that this process is a "projection" of memory, where the collective and the individual engage in remembrance to maintain a sense of belonging (Assmann, 2006). The act of remembering the dead in Ireland is thus inextricably tied to both national and religious identities, reinforcing the ethnoreligious divide.

Death and remembrance evoke a sense of continuity, which, as Benedict Anderson suggests, aligns with the notion of nationalism. If we accept that nation-states are both "new" and "historical," Anderson argues that nations are imagined communities that "loom out of an immemorial past" and glide into a limitless future, turning the contingency of national origins into a sense of destiny. This sense of continuity mirrors religious worldviews that address human mortality, offering narratives that transform the inevitability of death into a sense of enduring legacy and connection. Anderson reflects on the role of traditional religious worldviews, distinguishing between their capacity to provide profound insights into human existence and their use in legitimizing systems of domination. Religions like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism have persisted across millennia because of their ability to address universal human conditions—disease, aging, and death—while providing meaning and connection that transcend individual lives (Anderson, 1991).

Religion, in this context, responds to human mortality by transforming fatality into continuity. This impulse is deeply tied to the desire to link the dead with the unborn, fostering a sense of regeneration across generations. Anderson poignantly asks, "Who doesn't experience their child's connectedness, fortuity, and fatality in the language of 'continuity'?" By connecting birth and death, religion and nationalism offer meaning within the broader frameworks of community and nation, facilitating a sense of cohesion and belonging (Anderson, 1991).

However, as secularization took hold in Western societies, traditional religious frameworks began to lose their central place, but the need to confront suffering and achieve continuity did not disappear. Anderson notes that the decline of religious belief necessitated the creation of alternative forms of continuity, particularly through nationalism. Nationalism, like religion, offers a narrative of continuity, addressing the human need for connection across generations and providing an anchor to individuals' identities in an increasingly secular world. This shift is key to understanding how secularization and nationalism began to intertwine. Anderson points out that while the nation-state emerged as a key vessel for providing continuity in the wake of the decline of religious thought, it was not a simple replacement for religion. Rather, nationalism grew out of—and alongside—the cultural systems that preceded it, including religious frameworks (Anderson, 1991).

This intertwining of religion and nationalism becomes particularly evident when examining ethnoreligious identities. People not only inherit ethnoreligious identities by birth but also carry them into death, as evidenced by practices like segregated burial. These generational continuities strengthen the boundaries of ethnoreligious identities, particularly in the context of individual identity and marriage, where religious and cultural divisions are often most sharply defined (Anderson, 1991).

In the case of Northern Ireland, this merging of religious, national, and cultural boundaries through the memorialization of the dead and the perpetuation of sectarian identities highlights how nationalism and religion are not merely separate categories, but interwoven elements that shape communal identities. Anderson's exploration of the relationship between nationalism, religion, and continuity shows how the act of remembering—whether in the form of sectarian murals or memorials to the dead—functions not only as a political act but as a profound expression of cultural and religious belonging. This connection, rooted in both the living and the dead, underscores the persistence of ethnoreligious identities in shaping contemporary political and social landscapes.

The erosion of religious authority and the rise of nationalism are intertwined processes, with language playing a central role in this transformation. Anderson argues that classical communities once saw themselves as cosmically central, largely through their use of sacred languages like Latin, Pali, Arabic, or Chinese. These languages, though not universally spoken, were considered a bridge to a higher, divine order, offering a sense of belonging that transcended geographical and social boundaries. In contrast, modern nation-states rely on more localized, vernacular languages, and Anderson claims that earlier communities had a more exclusive sense of membership tied to these sacred languages, where only those who understood the sacred tongue were part of the imagined community (Anderson, 1991).

The tension between sacred and vernacular languages is evident in the Catholic debate over whether Latin or local languages should be used in the mass. Latin, as the sacred language of the Church, helped unify the Christian community across Europe, despite widespread illiteracy. Anderson highlights how the literate clergy, who could read and write in Latin, formed a hierarchical structure, guiding the masses through visual and auditory communication like stained glass windows and sermons. This created a transcendent community defined by a top-down structure, with the clergy acting as intermediaries between the divine and the faithful. Anderson connects the use of sacred languages to the impulse toward conversion, pointing to examples like Nicholas Breakspear, an Englishman who became Pope Adrian IV, to illustrate how mastery of sacred language could transcend ethnic or linguistic barriers (Anderson, 1991).

However, as Europe began to explore the world beyond its borders, the power of the religiously imagined community began to erode. Anderson notes that Europeans shifted from viewing themselves in terms of religious superiority to focusing on territoriality. This territorialization laid the groundwork for nationalism, as religious competition started to take on nationalistic overtones, with communities increasingly identifying with their faith in relation to territorial belonging. This shift, from a universal religious community to more self-conscious, politically oriented identities, marked a key moment in the decline of the religiously imagined community (Anderson, 1991).

The decline of sacred languages like Latin was further accelerated by the rise of print capitalism. As the printing press spread, vernacular languages began to replace Latin as the primary means of communication. By the mid-16th century, languages like French, German, and English had largely supplanted Latin in printed texts, signaling the fragmentation of the religious community that had once been unified through a single sacred language. This shift facilitated the rise of national identities, which were increasingly defined by language and territory, and laid the foundation for the emergence of modern nationalism (Anderson, 1991).

In parallel, Anderson contrasts the rise of nationalism with the older model of dynastic monarchy. Dynastic monarchies, which were based on divine ordination rather than popular sovereignty, had porous borders that allowed for the blending of cultures and ethnicities. Unlike modern nationalisms, which are often defined by rigid ethnic and linguistic boundaries, dynastic monarchies relied on marriage and imperial expansion to unite diverse populations under a single authority. Anderson notes that this system of governance, based on political and familial alliances, evolved into the more rigid and ethnocentric nation-state model, marking the shift from dynastic rule to modern nationalism (Anderson, 1991).

Martin Luther marked just the beginning of a massive ideological struggle across Europe—what Anderson identifies as a “battle for men’s minds.” This conflict, fueled by opposing religious propaganda, would define the following century. Anderson asserts that Protestantism was “on the offensive,” due to its relationship with the expanding vernacular print market, while the Counter-Reformation defended the traditional role of Latin as the sacred language (Anderson, 1991).

The alliance between print capitalism and Protestantism, aimed at securing profit for capitalists and attracting new followers for the Protestant cause, led to the widespread distribution of cheap publications in vernacular languages. This strategy helped bring in groups typically untrained in Latin, such as merchants and women, allowing Protestants to organize these groups for “politico-religious purposes.” In contrast, Anderson notes that “Latin’s religious authority never had a true political analogue,” as it remained largely unchallenged in its sacred role (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson also highlights the gradual and irregular use of vernacular languages by absolute monarchs as a key factor in the devaluation of the sacred imagined community. This use of vernaculars in state administration, which preceded both print capitalism and the religious upheavals of the 16th century, represents an early departure from Latin's dominance. However, Anderson clarifies that there is no evidence to suggest that the vernacularization of administration was driven by proto-national forces (Anderson, 1991).

In distinguishing pre-national states from modern nation-states, Anderson traces the shifting administrative languages of English monarchs. Before the Norman Conquest, Anglo-Saxon was the literary and administrative language of the court. Over the next century and a half, Latin was used almost exclusively for royal documents. Between 1200 and 1350, Latin was gradually replaced by Norman French, and a slow process of hybridization between Norman French and Anglo-Saxon created Early English (Anderson, 1991). Anderson emphasizes that these transitions were characteristic of “state” languages, not national languages, and notes that the territories these languages covered—England, Wales, parts of Ireland, Scotland, and France—were not unified by national identity but by dynastic expansion. Many subjects of these early states did not understand Latin, Norman French, or Early English, but spoke various distinct vernacular dialects. In these pre-national cases, Anderson argues, linguistic “choice” was a pragmatic, gradual, and often haphazard development (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson further explains that the old administrative languages—such as Latin, French in Paris, and Early English in London—were used by governing elites for internal communication. These languages were not intended to be imposed on the populations, which often spoke different vernaculars. When vernaculars eventually rose to the status of “languages-of-power,” they competed with older administrative languages. Anderson explains that this shifting dynamic “contributed to the decline of the imagined community of Christendom,” but he also notes that religiosity and religious language still played a role in the emerging vision of the nation (Anderson, 1991).

The rise of national imagined communities, while possible without these dynamics, was nonetheless set in motion by them. Anderson sums up the factors that created these new imagined communities as “a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communication (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity.” Capitalism and print allowed for mass readership by reaching monoglot audiences, while the loss of linguistic diversity occurred through a process of standardization. According to Anderson, capitalism was the most influential force behind this process. Print capitalism merged related vernaculars, creating new "languages-of-power" that were crucial in the formation of modern nation-states and nationalism (Anderson, 1991). Anderson argues that standardized print languages generated united fields of exchange and communication below Latin but above the spoken vernaculars. He states, “Speakers of a huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper” (Anderson, 1991). As a result, people began to recognize an affinity with hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of others within their specific “language-field,” where only those within these defined communities truly belonged. These communities were not defined by political boundaries, which, in the era of dynastic expansion, were porous. Anderson points out that while standardized English became a language-of-power, other dialects like Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Scots English were excluded (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson notes that the lexicographic revolution in Europe contributed to the conviction that languages were the personal property of specific groups—communities entitled to their place in a fraternity of equals. Print capitalism also brought greater consistency to language. For example, while 12th-century French differed from that written by Villon in the 15th century, the rate of change slowed in the 16th century. By the 17th century, languages in Europe began to resemble those spoken today. A shared readership, connected through print, set the stage for the modern concept of the nation as an imagined community, contributing to the illusion of national continuity from the past to the present (Anderson, 1991). This continuity, whether defined by birth, death, religion, or nation, became a crucial force in shaping group identity.

Yet, Anderson adds complexity to the concept of belonging, noting that “the concrete formation of contemporary nation-states is by no means isomorphic with the determinate reach of particular print-languages.” For example, while English is widely spoken in Ireland as a legacy of colonialism, Irish national identity is firmly distinct from English identity. Similarly, the Scots language, despite its limited recognition in modern English print, remains a key part of Scottish identity. This dynamic is especially significant in Northern Ireland, where Ulster Scots and Irish are both politicized in their association with group identity (Anderson, 1991).

During the final stages of the national separatist movements in the Americas, European nationalist movements began to emerge. This shift was a by-product of the philological revolution and the rise of capitalism, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century. As Anderson observes, the expansion of European nationalist movements created significant cultural and political challenges for dynastic rulers, but the growing nature of dynastic states also played a role in defining the perceived nation, serving as a foundation through their historical expansion. Within a century, nationalism would become a global phenomenon. Anderson explains:

> The 'nation' thus became something capable of being consciously aspired to from early on, rather than a slowly sharpening frame of vision. Indeed, as we shall see, the 'nation' proved an invention on which it was impossible to secure a patent. It became available for pirating by widely different, and sometimes unexpected hands (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson argues that the Hapsburg dynasty did not intend to Germanize their subjects, as some members of the family did not even speak German. Even those Hapsburg emperors who pursued Germanization did so not for nationalist purposes but rather to promote the "unification and universalism of their empire." As the policy of Germanization intensified, the empire increasingly appeared to favor its German-speaking subjects, provoking growing antipathy from others. Anderson notes that a similar motivation lay behind the Anglicization of English monarchs' subjects, as the British crown, like the Hapsburgs, sought to advance the "unification and universalism of their empire" (Anderson 1991).

By the mid-nineteenth century, Anderson observes, all European dynasts were using some form of vernacular as their language-of-state. This lexicographic revolution led to a growing sense of national identity as monarchs and elites realized their connection to the broader nations they governed. As Anderson writes, "Romanovs discovered they were great Russians, Hanoverians that they were English, Hohenzollerns that they were Germans—and with rather more difficulty their cousins turned Romanian, Greek, and so forth" The Hanoverians, for example, who ruled over the United Kingdom (including Ireland) from 1714 to 1901, were of German origin but eventually embraced their English identity (Anderson 1991).

The nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic increase in literacy, accompanied by the expansion of commerce, industry, communications, and state machinery as capitalism and industrialization reached new heights. This period also saw further impetus for "vernacular linguistic unification." While Latin had long served as a language-of-state, it could not sustain its role in the nineteenth century as the language of business, science, the press, or literature—

especially in a world where these languages continuously interacted. As a result, vernacular languages-of-state began to gain prominence (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson explains that as these vernacular languages-of-state gained power—initially by accident—the English pushed the Irish language out of much of Ireland, a process similar to the sidelining of Breton in France or Catalan in Spain. This trend also created significant disparities between urban and rural populations within emerging vernacular-based imagined communities. A key factor in this dynamic was the relationship between these populations and what Anderson calls the "missionaries of nationalism." In Ireland, for example, the Catholic priesthood, drawn from the peasantry and closely connected to it, played a vital mediating role in the rise of nationalism. Anderson observes that Catholicism became deeply entwined with Irish identity, and this linguistic legacy remains a powerful contrast to other national movements.

In Northern Ireland, the linguistic divide has fueled division. Catholics have strongly claimed the Irish language as part of their national identity, while Protestants of Scottish heritage have countered with their own claim to Ulster Scots. Anderson notes that the entire dynamic is reactive. According to Seton-Watson, as summarized by Anderson, Scots—or "northern English"—is a language or dialect related to English, born from the same hybridization of Saxon and French, but with less French influence and more Celtic and Scandinavian influence than southern English. Scots was spoken at the Scottish court and by the social elites (who were occasionally bilingual in Gaelic), as well as by the broader Lowland population. Anderson observes that Scots, the language of poets like Robert Henryson and William Dunbar, might have evolved into a separate literary language were it not for the union of the crowns in 1603, which led to southern English dominating in the Scottish court, administration, and elite circles. For many Ulster Protestants, Ulster Scots is seen as a direct continuation of Scotland's linguistic and cultural heritage.

By the seventeenth century, what would one day be "imagined as [the nation of] Scotland" had sizeable areas that were already English speaking with access to print-English which supported a budding English literacy. By the early eighteenth century, the English-speaking Lowlands united with London to diminish the Gaeltacht areas. Anglicization was not an intentional policy as much as a by-product; still, in this cooperative "northward thrust," the combined forces of the elites had—prior to the age of nationalism—eradicated the prospect of a later vernacular-tied national movement. Anglicization offered novel prospects for middle-class Scottish "functionaries, schoolmasters, merchants, and planters." One of the distinctions between the nationalisms of the Americas and the nationalisms of Europe—with the former undoubtedly influencing the latter—is referenced by Anderson in his citing of Tom Nairn. In his book, *The Breakup of Britain*, Nairn references a "massive intellectual migration" in which Scottish politicians traveled to London to legislate and Scottish businessmen followed suit for their own commercial interests. Unlike in the Americas—or, to an even lesser extent, Ireland—there were not significant barriers for the Scottish intellectuals in their migration to the political and economic center. As Anderson extrapolates, "English had yet to become an 'English' language" making the linguistic spread not yet tied to national identity (Anderson, 1991). Though arguably today, the English language has only expanded its mark well beyond the nation. This expansion of course is the byproduct of the empire in its most still-prevailing form, colonialism.

On the topic of empire, Seton-Watson, as cited by Anderson, refers to a process, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, of reestablishing Europe's dynasties into what he terms "official nationalisms." These nationalisms were impossible until popular linguistic nationalisms set the stage. Official nationalisms were reactionary and conservative responses from those in power, particularly dynastic and aristocratic, threatened with obsolescence and removal in newly imagined communities. As a result, they tailored the model of the burgeoning popular nationalisms that had come before. Anderson names the Russification of the Czar's expansive empire as the most familiar example (Anderson, 1991). He summarizes this view:

> These "official nationalisms" can best be understood as a means for combining naturalization with retention of dynastic power, in particularly over the huge polyglot domains accumulated since the Middle Ages, or, to put it another way, for stretching the short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire. 'Russification' of the heterogeneous population of the Czar's subjects thus represented a violent conscious welding of two opposing political orders, one ancient, one quite new (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson explains how the merging together of the nation and the dynastic empire was reactive to the escalating national movements spreading across Europe since the 1820s (Anderson, 1991). How else do we account for the conception of the United Kingdom, a national body defined through the history of a dynastic empire, that was able to bind the polyglot, diverse cultures of the Atlantic Archipelago together? This too is a type of official nationalism.

Yet, in comparison with the more continuous regional Czarist expansion, the British Empire was an assortment of many far-off territories dispersed over every continent. As a result, a slim minority were afforded political and economic ties with the metropolis. There were also far more distinctions in religious, linguistic, and cultural memory across the British Empire's subjects. The scattered nature of the British Empire leads Anderson to state that, "Nothing more sharply underscores the fundamental contradiction of English official nationalism;" it is a fundamental "inner incompatibility of empire and nation" (Anderson, 1991). Thus, Anglicization itself was not enough to make one British.

Wherever it was established, the official nation blurred the distinction between the nation and the dynastic realm. As Anderson exemplifies, "Slovaks were Magyarized, Indians Anglicized and Koreans Japanified, but they would not be permitted to join pilgrimages which would allow them to administer Magyars, Englishmen, or Japanese." To Anderson, this is a serious contradiction between the nation and the empire (Anderson, 1991). The distinction between the United Kingdom and the British colonies was well defined.

By Anderson's account, this high dynasticism came to an end after World War I. Come 1922, the Habsburgs, the Hohenzollerns, the Romanovs, and the Ottomans had all become history. A new era was marked by the establishment of the League of Nations. From this point onward, international legitimacy was afforded solely through a collective acknowledgement of the nation-state. As a result, Anderson claims, "even the surviving imperial powers came [to the League] dressed in national costume rather than imperial uniform." By the end of World War II, the nation-state—and their narratives of continuity since time immemorial—had firmly planted themselves. By the mid-1970s, the Portuguese Empire which had incited the colonial era and "the Age of Discovery" had similarly become a remnant of history (Anderson, 1991).

In the sixteenth century, European settlers began what Anderson describes as a "strange habit" of naming faraway lands after places in Europe, often as "new" versions of their supposed European equivalents. This trend, which started in the Americas, quickly spread to Asia, Australia, and Oceania. Across the United States, Canada, Australasia, Africa, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, one can find towns named after Irish, Scottish, and English locations. Anderson finds this naming practice particularly significant because it reflects how the terms “new” and “old” were understood synchronically, co-existing within a homogeneous, empty time. This approach to naming was more about sibling competition than inheritance, presenting new lands as parallel to existing European communities. According to Anderson, this parallelism played a key role in shaping American nationalisms, with the success of American nationalist revolutions serving as a catalyst for the nationalist “awakening” in Europe (Anderson, 1991).

In Europe, new nationalisms quickly imagined themselves as having “awakened from sleep,” a movement that set them apart from their ancestors and promised a return to an aboriginal essence. By the nineteenth century, European states were vast, polyglot polities, where the boundaries often didn’t align with language communities. These language communities had long been considered “languages of civilization,” but the concept was initially limited to Latin, French, English, Spanish, and German. It wasn’t until the late eighteenth century that these languages began to be linked with specific, territorially defined groups. Around the same time, so-called “uncivilized vernaculars” began to serve political purposes, much like in the Americas, helping to separate subject communities from ancient dynastic empires (Anderson, 1991).

The increasing prominence of vernacular languages enabled the literati and bourgeoisie in various nations to view themselves as distinct national communities. For example, Czechs, Hungarians, Finns, and Irish began to embrace their languages, folklores, and music as a way of “rediscovering” something deeply inherent to their identities. As Anderson notes, language, often considered proof of historical continuity, was a key marker of national identity because its origins were impossible to pin down. The Irish language, in particular, has played a significant role in asserting continuity in the Irish nation, separate from external powers (Anderson, 1991).

In contrast, early American nationalist movements did not face the same linguistic challenges as their European counterparts, particularly since settlers had committed genocide against indigenous populations. The settlers’ rigid caste system, which defined humanity precisely, promoted a singular culture, and enforced assimilation, meant that language was less of an issue. Anderson argues that it was the shared language, religion, and culture with the metropole that made early national imaginings in the Americas possible. This commonality created a narrative of continuity that contributed to the formation of the nation. While Anderson effectively outlines the foundations of nationalism and the decline of religion, ethnoreligiousity and nationalism often intertwined, at times becoming indistinguishable (Anderson, 1991).

One of the most influential works on religious nationalism is Anthony D. Smith's *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*. Smith explores how the concept of being "chosen by God" has shaped national and group identities, beginning with God's covenant with Abraham in the Old Testament, where God promises, “unto thy seed I have given this land.” This idea, Smith argues, has been central in fostering deep national and group identities. He suggests that the passion and commitment individuals feel for their nations, stirred by nationalism, cannot be fully understood through traditional economic and political terms. Instead, it is through religion—its symbols, rituals, and collective practices—that such fervor is inspired. However, Smith clarifies that nationalism is not merely a "political" religion, but rather a form of loyalty rooted in deeply held religious beliefs, sentiments, and practices, tied to a powerful understanding of the sacred. He also argues that separating religion from culture, or culture from religion, often proves fruitless (Smith, 2003).

Smith further explains that the relationship between religion and land is profound. The sense of what is sacred is often linked to the land—what is perceived as "holy land" or where people live, with its associated memories, heroes, monuments, and the burial sites of ancestors. The community of believers—often seen as the chosen nation—and their families, share in a glorious past and a golden age that preceded the present decline. This also includes the veneration of war heroes and fallen soldiers who sacrificed their lives to defend the community, preserving its sacred destiny, which in turn reflects the political cult of the dead (Smith, 2003).

The biblical concept of chosen peoples and divine right to land was frequently invoked in European colonial conquests in the Americas and elsewhere. The notion that certain people were divinely chosen and had a right to the land became central in building shared national identities and justifying colonial actions. In modern times, even in secularized forms, these ideals persist and shape how societies understand themselves, often framing national identity in terms of the sacred. Smith notes that these concepts still play a significant role in the rhetoric of politicians, businessmen, and intellectuals, despite the common dismissal of religious nationalism in favor of a "post-national" world order (Smith, 2003).

In *Chosen Peoples*, Smith references various scholars who describe England as one of the earliest nations, though these definitions of nation differ from Benedict Anderson's in *Imagined Communities*. Anderson argues that England may be better understood as a precursor to the modern nation, a model eventually replicated globally as a symbol of prosperity, sovereignty, and legitimacy on the international stage. Smith cites Adrian Hastings, who argues that England constituted a nation as early as the reign of King Alfred, making it the first nation, with the exception of Ethiopia, Armenia, and ancient Israel. However, Smith contends that regardless of whether one accepts this view, it is clear that the English, Irish, Welsh, and later the Scots saw themselves as distinct peoples, standing under God's sign as his elect. England's colonial legacy, he notes, would imbue these early national perceptions with global significance, spreading their narrative through missionary efforts that accompanied colonial conquests (Smith, 2003).

Smith highlights that Hastings views Alfred the Great as a significant figure in early nation-building due to his approach to political education for his kingdom. Alfred promoted the myth of his royal anointing by the Pope and presented himself as a restorer of a golden age. He sought to unify his kingdom with an all-English law code, incorporating existing Anglo-Saxon laws, and began promoting Anglo-Saxon vernacular literature. Alfred also played a role in developing a bilingual intelligentsia, with education in both English and Latin (Smith, 2003).

However, Alfred was not the first to imagine England as a unified entity. As early as the eighth century, Bede described England as a *gens* (people) or *natio* (nation), and it was Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* that Alfred translated into English. For Bede, as for Alfred, England was envisioned biblically as an island "nation" under God, subject to the same privileges and punishments as ancient Israel. This interpretation followed the earlier views of Gildas, a sixth-century historian, who saw the Germanic invasions of Britain as divine punishment for the sins of the Britons. Gildas' writings, filled with allusions to the Old Testament, compared the Britons' plight to a sinful Israel and the invasions to the Assyrian conquest of Israel. These parallels between Exodus and Israel would later influence

Anglo-Saxon writings, such as the *Old English* poems *Exodus* and *The Battle of Maldon*, as well as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Smith, 2003).

These historical accounts, shaped by biblical providentialism, laid the foundation for the perception of "English closeness," especially among the elite. Smith notes that these interpretations were largely shaped by the Church, the monarchy, and the clergy. The Church, supported by the monarchy, advanced these providentialist readings of Anglo-Saxon history, influencing wider society through its diocesan organization (Smith, 2003).

In the face of foreign rule, the Norman Conquest did little to diminish the sense of English nationhood. For nearly 200 years, French had replaced Anglo-Saxon among the English elites. Yet, as Adrian Hastings and John Gillingham have noted, esteemed writers from this period, such as Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and William of Malmesbury, cultivated a sense of English national identity. It wasn't until the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, however, that a stronger English "national sentiment" emerged, spurred by wars led by Edward I against Wales, Scotland, and France. During the "age of Chaucer," the rise of the English language in courts and administration further solidified national identity. Hastings traces the modern use of the term "nation" to this period (Smith, 2003).

In Ireland, a similar period saw more aggressive policies from the Old English toward the native Irish as the English sought to consolidate their earlier Norman settlement under Henry II. The Statutes of Kilkenny (1366) aimed to strengthen the English presence by promoting their language and culture, while simultaneously opposing the "fickle" and "degenerate" Irish (Smith, 2003).

English monarchs, from Edward I to Henry V, played influential roles in shaping what would become the English nation. However, "[no firm] theology of sacred kingdom and mission… seems to have developed during this period." The English Church remained solidly Roman in perspective, with its leadership staying "fairly cosmopolitan." While Richard II and Henry V sought to elevate the Crown, and the Plantagenet kings gained celebrity after their victories in France, the Magna Carta Libertatum shifted elite loyalties toward parliament and the rule of law (Smith, 2003).

At the start of the sixteenth century, a more dynamic national identity began to form in England, with a developing "sense of mission." Smith cites Liah Greenfield, who identifies this period as the origin of the first nationalism, dating it to the early sixteenth century, "prior to the Henrician Reformation." During this time, Tudor writings increasingly associated the nation with the people—a key criterion for nationalism according to Greenfield. However, Smith argues that this was only one, albeit important, component of nationalism, which would fully emerge in the eighteenth century. He states that it was later in the sixteenth century that a widespread belief in English "closeness and mission" arose—aligning more directly with Benedict Anderson's analysis in *Imagined Communities* of nationalism as a modern phenomenon (Smith, 2003).

Antiquarians and historians of the 16th century, including John Leland, William Camden, and Richard Verstegen, fervently supported the English Trojan and Saxon origin story. John Bale, a Protestant churchman and historian of the same period, claimed that the British Church had pre-Roman origins, supposedly founded by Joseph of Arimathea. This belief is also reflected in Elizabethan literature, especially in Shakespeare's well-known history plays from the 1590s, written after England's victory over Spain. In these plays, Shakespeare portrays King Henry V as "reflective," likening him to both Moses and King David, suggesting that "England's kingdom is the true successor of the ancient Israelite kingdom" (Smith, 2003).

The most significant expression of English ethnic election, however, emerged post-Reformation, particularly in the proliferation of printed Bible translations from the 1560s onwards. This was notably true of *The Actes and Monuments* (John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*), first printed in 1554 and amended in 1570, which is "full of Old Testament imagery of covenant with God, idolatry, sin, and war." Initially, Protestantism was an international, even European, religion, but the Henrician Reformation produced a "dramatic martyrology" that reinforced and blended with the already prevalent English national sentiment (Smith, 2003).

Foxe argued that the English had remained true to the authentic Christian faith by breaking with Rome. England's calling, he claimed, was to serve as the wellspring of the Reformation. Foxe declared the English as God's chosen people, distinguished by their zeal for the true religion found in the reformed Church—a Church many had endured persecution and martyrdom to establish. This religious fervor was understood as a manifestation of national identity, reinforced by the belief that England was protected by divine providence. In 1559, John Aylmer, future bishop of London, famously declared, "God is English"; "England is a ‘land of plenty’”; and “God and his angels fought on her side against foreign foes.” Similarly, a pamphlet from 1554 prayed, “O Lord, defend thy elect people of Inglond from the hands and force of thy enemies, the Papists” (Smith, 2003). These expressions of ethnic and religious election were pivotal in early English nationalism.

In the post-Reformation era, the foundation for an “imperial monarchy and sacred kingship” was propagated. Edward Foxe had already suggested by 1534 that emperors ruled over subordinate territories. Henry VIII embraced this philosophy when he integrated Wales, claimed feudal overlordship of Scotland, and declared himself King of Ireland. Henry VIII came to view himself as a “latter-day King David”—“God’s vicar on earth within his domain, having sovereignty over both state and Church.” His favorite monarchs were David, Solomon, Constantine, and Justinian. According to John Guy, as cited by Smith, Henry “read the Psalms as a commentary on his own divine mission and regality” (Smith, 2003).

Edward VI, Henry’s son and successor, was similarly compared by his Protestant counselors to King Josiah—an Old Testament king who, alongside Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, overthrew idols and destroyed Baal altars. Under Edward’s protection, his counselors oversaw the reformed services and the circulation of new Prayer Books (Smith, 2003).

Elizabeth I asserted royal supremacy, claiming her rule was a “sacral monarchy.” The translators of the 1560 Geneva Bible supported this depiction in their dedicatory Epistle to Elizabeth. According to Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, a sacral monarchy should “champion true religion” and be godly, akin to the honorable kings of Judah who followed their priestly counselors and implemented the “book of law.” To most of Elizabeth’s subjects, the sacral monarchy and her image as the beloved Virgin Queen symbolized England's favor in God's eyes during the nation’s time of need (Smith, 2003).

The Puritans played a significant role in the next century in strengthening the association between the English people and God’s elect, particularly through their rebellion and regicide. While they were a minority, they held influential positions in Parliament and Cromwell’s New Model Army. Amid the Civil War, fueled by conflicting religious views, the Puritan myth of English ethnic election became a prominent interpretation of English history. Their understanding of a missionary “election” was not new, but it reinforced earlier traditions of English chosenness. Smith, referencing Han Kohn, argues that the Puritan myth became deeply embedded in English nationalism, as their vision of liberty for all Englishmen spread widely through print and pulpit, creating a profound sense of national community unparalleled at the time (Smith, 2003). However, this vision of a “horizontal comradeship” was not applied beyond the defined borders of England, particularly evident in their policies in Ireland.

John Milton, a canonical English literary figure, was invested in a nationalism tied to early stages of internationalism. He viewed England as leading a group of nations progressing toward religious and civil liberty. Oliver Cromwell, an English general, was more focused on a nationalism of missionary expansion. His soldiers fought energized by hymns and Old Testament songs, believing they were “fighting the Lord’s battles.” Cromwell viewed the English as “a people that have a stamp upon them from God” and believed they were “called upon to bring true religion to all.” His actions in Ireland were driven by these convictions (Smith, 2003).

In 1653, to the Little Parliament, Cromwell gave a speech encouraging the members: “Truly you are called by God as Judah was to rule with Him, and for Him…” Then, in 1657, he characterize the English people as:

> A People of the blessing of God; a People under the name of the Lord; which the heathen do not. A People knowing God; and a People fearing God. And you have of this no parallel; no, not in all the world… You have a good Eye to watch over you… A God that has watched over you and us. A God that hath visited these Nations with a stretched-out arm; and bore His witness against the unrighteousness and ungodliness of man, against those that would have abused such Nations… (Smith, 2003).

The myth of English Protestant election, following the events of 1689 with the accession of a British national identity and the constitutional settlement, did not diminish but rather prevailed. Despite resistance to British political and religious unity due to significant religious differences across Britain, the dominant power structure remained Protestant—and more specifically Anglican—particularly due to its centralization in England. This British Protestant identity continued to express national exclusivity, including anti-Popery riots at home and colonial notions of cultural supremacy and paternalism abroad. An element of British expansion and imperialism, which Smith characterizes as being secured by “conquest, civilization, and Christianization,” was rooted in the Protestant belief in the missionary election of the English (Smith, 2003).

The development of a broader ‘British’ identity, which incorporated many English sentiments, can be traced back to 1603 with the union of the Scottish and English crowns. King James VI of Scotland (James I of England), the first Scottish king of Britain, believed that a Scottish settlement in Ulster would be more successful than the English settlement in the Pale, due to the shared Gaelic heritage and common origin story between the Scots and the Irish. He sought to assure religious conformity between Scotland and England despite Presbyterian pushback. However, the union of Parliaments did not occur until 1707, meaning the monarchy was still the primary determinant of national identity. British identity, however, never proved persuasive enough to extinguish older group identities—such as English, Scots, Welsh, and Irish—each of which has persisted (Smith, 2003).

Smith references J.C.D. Clark, who argues that “Britishness in its prevalent sense rested in large part on the ancient if differently formulated identities of England’s neighbors.” Clark, citing Patrick Wormald and John Gillingham, asserts that the groundwork for an English national identity predated the Reformation and that Protestantism merely reinvigorated this identity through Bible translations and the Anglican Church. As a result, in the eighteenth century, allegiance to the British polity was “ideologically engendered,” with Christianity being the force that “interpreted that allegiance” throughout the following century (Smith, 2003).

In Scotland, prior to unification, different beliefs in ethnic election developed in response to invasive English cultural and political domination. As Smith argues, this responsive characteristic makes the case of Scottish ethnic election distinct. Early modern Scotland exhibited a reluctant acceptance of Protestantism, with Protestant beliefs often seen as imposed by English dominance. In Ireland, the medieval and early modern periods saw an even stronger rejection of Protestant English nationalism, which was deemed unacceptable both on religious and cultural grounds. Compared to Wales and Ireland, the Scottish belief in dynastic ethnic election was closer to the English belief, though it lacked the missionary element that characterized English nationalism (Smith, 2003).

Scotland’s identity was shaped by the convergence of four peoples: the Picts in the northeast, the Scots (Gaels) from the west (Ireland), the Britons of Strathclyde, and, from the late eighth century, Scandinavians in the north and west. This blend of cultures made it challenging to define a singular origin story and, by extension, a unified national identity.

However, by the mid-ninth century, the Picts and Scots began to merge their cultures, a process largely attributed to Kenneth mac Alpin, who is credited with founding the united kingdom of Alba (Gaelic) or Scotia (Latin) (Smith, 2003).

It was not until the twelfth century that a northern dialect of English, known as Scots, became the predominant language in the area south of the Scottish Highlands. Several factors contributed to the solidification of Scotland's political identity. One factor was geography, which Tacitus described as a "huge and shapeless tract of country jutting out towards the land's end." Another was the advancement of the kingdom, which was solidified through dynastic succession from Malcolm Canmore to Alexander III (1097–1286). Lastly, the increasing independence of the Scottish Church, supported by reforms introduced by Malcolm's wife, Queen Margaret, played a crucial role. The church's independence was further solidified in 1192, when it won the right to be directly accountable to the Pope, rather than to the archbishops of York (Smith, 2003). By 1286, following the fatal accident of Alexander III, the kingdom of Alba (or Scotia) had developed a shared sense of identity. This communal identity helped sustain the Scottish people through the factional divisions of their nobles during the wars of independence. These wars were ignited by animosity over uncertain succession and, after 1290, by Edward I's interference in Scottish affairs (Smith, 2003).

The war for independence had significant public support in Scotland, particularly among Wallace's followers. "The army of the realm" was composed primarily of the "middle folk" who had the most to lose from Edward I's financial and land extortion, including "freeholders, poor knights, and rich husbandmen." As the war continued, in 1299–1300, Edward I and the Scots defending their position to Pope Boniface VIII eventually produced the earliest recorded version of the mythical origin of Scotland and the Scots. This statement claimed that the Scots descended from a daughter of an Egyptian Pharaoh, Scota, who drowned in the Red Sea while pursuing the Israelites (Smith, 2003).

The Scottish Church, in 1309, supported Robert the Bruce's kingship because of his role in restoring the realm that had been ravaged by Edward I. Edward I's son, Edward II, continued his father's aggressive claims over Scotland, even after the English defeat at Bannockburn. This continued until 1320, when 39 named barons, along with countless others, declared "the whole community of the realm of Scotland" and reaffirmed Scotland's independence "from its origins until that moment" (Smith, 2003). Thus, Scotland's identity and origin story became reactive to repeated English interference and invasion.

In the *Declaration of Arbroath* (1320), Scotland's complex origin story was laid out. The Scots were described as a people with many "distinctions," beginning with an expedition from Greater Scythia to Spain, where they resided for centuries before settling in Scotland. The declaration claims the Scots had overseen their lands under a "single unbroken native dynasty of 113 kings," and it proclaims that "[the Scots have] high qualities and merits… because our lord Jesus Christ called them, even though [they] settled in the uttermost ends of the earth, almost the first to his most holy faith." The Scots are also depicted as being under the protection of their patron, the Apostle Andrew, who strengthened the kingdom and its people. According to the declaration, the Scots lived in freedom and peace until Edward I's occupation, which was later overturned by "our most valiant prince, king, and lord, the lord Robert," who bore hardships "like another Maccabeus or Joshua" (Smith, 2003). Like the English to the south, the Scots used biblical—particularly Old Testament—references to place their story within a larger narrative of divine providence and chosenness.

The Scots begged the Pope to reprimand the English king and ask him "to leave in peace us Scots, who live in this poor little Scotland, beyond which there is no dwelling-place at all, and who desire nothing but [our] own." The Scots advised that, instead of attacking their "smaller neighbors" the Christian princes should go to war for the Holy Land. The Scots declared their belief in the ultimate authority of the Most High, according to the declaration, will give them valor and give nothing to their enemies (Smith, 2003).

In a narrative of Celtic origins, the captivation of the times past *gens* and *natio Scottorum* (the Scott/ the Gaels) characterizes a new political movement, a more inclusive one that went beyond aristocratic leaders by including the middle ranks of society. This gave new-found confidence to the Scots in their group identity, their unique historical heritage, and their exceptional religious and political status—all of this highlighted by the Christian allusions and Old Testament parallels declaring the Scots and their king Robert the Bruce chosen (Smith, 2003). Thus the "Celtic origin" of the Scots helps to distinguish them from the English to the south.

Furthermore, the "Celtic" myth of migration from Egypt through Spain into Scotland spoke to a common ethnic ancestry and language with the Irish. This was counter positioned to the English myth, presented by Geoffrey of Monmouth, claiming that after Brutus' death, the island of Britain was divided between his three sons: Albanactus (Scotland), Kamber (Wales), and Locrinus (England). Smith, citing Duncan, explains that although there was a significant antiquarian exploration into Scotland's Celtic heritage, the appeal of descent or "race" was largely in the interest of restoring inhibited ancient freedoms of the Scots and the Irish (Smith, 2003). In the 1370s, John Barbour's epic poem, the Bruce, was the first on record to ponder the meaning of the "freedom" fought for in the wars of independence against the English:

> Ah! Freedom is a noble thing
> Freedom makes man to have his liking;
> Freedom all solace to man gives
> He lives at ease that freely lives… (Smith, 2003).

Soon after Barbour's epic poem, the Scottish Chronicler John of Fordun assembled his notable history of the Scots. It started with their origin story with a goal to underscore the independent origins of the Scots, starting with the Egyptian Scota, the migrations to Spain and Ireland, and ultimate settlement and unbroken sovereignty in Scotland where they defied "even the Romans." It was not until the following century in 1437-60, however, during the first decade of James II's kingship, that John Fordun's complete account of early Scottish history emerged. According to Smith's reading of Bruce Webster, all subsequent histories, and writings—in the earlier image of Scotland from Tacitus to the Declaration of Arbroath—display a "fierce nationalism." They show Scotland as trapped by the ocean at "the world's end," meek and secluded, but proud and independent. Though in practice, as Smith reminds the reader, Scotland was only secluded for relatively short periods of time (Smith, 2003).

After 1559, these nationalist writings laid the foundation for a deeply Calvinist Presbyterianism. With the guidance of Knox, and after the return of the Marian exiles, a sense of chosenness was generated among a society of covenanted Bible-readers who only continued to gain a larger following by the later sixteenth century (Smith, 2003). According to Keith Brown, by the seventeenth century, the Presbyterians:

> Succeeded in creating a national story of a Godly and suffering people, who origins lay in the primitive Culdee Church rather than in any relationship with Rome, struggling to overcome the worldly ambitions of kings, ambitious and greedy lords, and interfering Englishmen (Smith, 2003).

It was through this communal myth of Scottish ethnic election, established through English interference, that pushed the Scots occasionally into politics south of the border (Smith, 2003).

Concluding these ideas, Smith largely concurs with Benedict Anderson’s views on the development of nationalism. He references Anderson’s observations on the role of census-taking and map-making, noting that these modern practices enabled states to create a tangible "body of the nation," thereby transforming the abstract concept of the nation into something real and documented in history. Smith further argues that it was the fusion of vernacular languages with native religions that formed a lasting cultural foundation for the rise of nationalism in the modern era (Smith, 2003).

While the ethnic self-definition of the English and Scottish populations is marked by important differences, both reveal the profound impact of religious beliefs in shaping concepts of ethnic and dynastic election. These beliefs were pivotal in the emergence of nationalism, particularly in its modern form as autonomous nation-states in the eighteenth century. Central to both the English and Scottish experiences is the idea of chosenness—whether missionary or covenantal—which Smith argues has "provided a key cultural resource for the modern sense of national identity, as well as for the ongoing reinterpretations of such identities" (Smith, 2003). These national identities trace their roots to ideological frameworks shaped by Anglicanism and Presbyterianism. Ulster Protestants, who often identify as both British and sometimes Scottish, play a crucial role in this narrative (Smith, 2003).

However, the Irish have a distinct national-origin story. While their belief in the sacredness of their land has deep historical roots, particularly in Celtic relics and the influence of Saint Patrick’s mission, their national identity diverges from both the Scottish and English models. The concept of Ireland as a sacred land is deeply embedded in Irish culture, where the island's beauty and spiritual significance are intertwined (Smith, 2003). Donatus of Fiesole, an Irish bishop in the ninth century, wrote of Ireland from Italy:

The finest land of the far west,
Known in ancient texts as Scottia,
Rich in goods, silver, jewels, and gold,
Beneficial for the body with its mild air and fertile soil.
Ireland’s plains, flowing with honey and milk,
Abundant in silk, arms, fruits, art, and people.
The Irish deserve to dwell in this land,

A land known for its warriors, its peace, and its faith.
(Smith, 2003)

This description highlights Ireland's golden age during the early medieval period, when Irish monasticism flourished and produced cultural masterpieces like the Book of Kells and the Tara Brooch. This era also played a pivotal role in shaping nineteenth-century Irish nationalism, as the golden age became a symbol of Ireland's unique early Christian history and its sacred texts. Saint Patrick's mission in the fifth century was crucial in establishing a distinctive form of Christianity in Ireland, separate from Roman traditions. Although Patrick himself came from the British Church, which followed Roman practices, his adaptation of Christianity to Ireland's tribal and rural society helped form a unique Christian identity. This distinctiveness led to the development of a unique monastic structure and a strong sense of Irish selfhood. Irish monks, such as St. Columbanus, became some of the most influential missionaries of their time, spreading Christianity throughout Scotland and England (Britain). This missionary success was particularly significant because the Irish converted more Britons to Christianity than Britons converted Irishmen. The importance of this can be seen in the words of Bede, quoted by D.L.T. Bethell in *The Originality of the Irish Church*: "Gentiles learn best from Gentiles" (Smith, 2003; Bethell, 1981). This highlights how Irish missionaries, deeply rooted in their own culture, were particularly effective in spreading Christianity in regions that had been outside of Roman influence. Ireland's missionary work thus became a central force in the spread of Christianity in Britain during the early medieval period.

By the late medieval period, Ireland had been referred to as *Insula Sacra*—Sacred Island—by earlier Roman writers, a motif revived by Gaelic poets and society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This idea was linked to the uniqueness of the Gaelic language and culture, especially as it intersected with the Gaelic-Catholic identity promoted in works like the *Lebor Gabala Erenn* (*Book of Invasions*), a text that traces the origins of the Gaels. The revivalists' goal was not just to trace the history of the Gaels, but to assert their Christian roots—particularly Catholic—arguing that these two identities were inseparable (Smith, 2003).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a new wave of religious and political activity was shaped by bards, poets, and Catholic clergy, who articulated concepts of "faith and fatherland" in the context of growing religious conflict. The Counter-Reformation provided a framework for friars to shape Irish Catholicism while responding to the rise of Protestantism and colonial pressures from the English. According to Smith, key themes in Gaelic literature from this period include the representation of Ireland’s sovereignty through female figures, the island's remoteness, and the development of a shared Irish identity. Both Old English settlers and the Gaelic literati began to resist the colonial efforts of the New English, particularly the Protestant settlers (Smith, 2003).

Moalmhuire O hUiginn, a former archbishop of Taum, wrote a poem in exile praising Ireland as a land capable of curing melancholy, describing it as an "angelic land" and a "fortress of paradise." He contends that remaining in the fatherland would inspire deep loyalty to both God and the indigenous culture (Smith, 2003). However, another recurring motif in Gaelic literature portrays Ireland as abandoned and in mourning. For example, in the early seventeenth-century lament *Iomdha eagnach ag Eirinn* (*Ireland Has Many Sorrows*) and in the elegy by Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird for the death of Hugh O'Donnell, Ireland is depicted as leaderless and lost without its hero. Geoffrey Keating, a Catholic priest of Anglo-Norman descent, described Ireland as a tragic widow, violated by foreign invasions, and likened it to a "debased harlot" in response to the suffering of the displaced native Irish (Smith, 2003).

Smith also references Marc Caball's work, which argues that Ireland's depiction as insular was common in medieval Gaelic literature, often emphasizing not just the island’s physical separation but also its beauty and religiosity. This insularity was seen as contributing to the land’s sacredness, with the island often portrayed as a holy refuge. However, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this imagery took on new political significance. For instance, in a letter from 1579, James FitzMaurice, an Anglo-Norman nobleman, called for armed resistance against the English, framing the conflict as one in which the Irish were defending both their faith and their land, with the promise of heaven as their reward (Smith, 2003).

By the eighteenth century, these ideas found a broader following. Smith cites John Hutchinson, who reports that by the 1740s, a group of Anglo-Irish antiquarians began collecting Gaelic poetry, folklore, legal texts, and customs. Their goal was to publish a "true history of Ireland" that emphasized the unity of Ireland's populations. This effort culminated in the founding of an academy dedicated to the Irish language and literature in 1785. This academic movement had a profound political impact, as early revivalists ascribed great significance to the idea of *Insula Sacra*. As Smith explains, these antiquarians saw Ireland as "blessed with natural advantages—its geography, climate, and soil suited to commerce and the arts of both peace and war" (Smith, 2003). Within this beautiful island, they saw a sense of kinship and belonging. Smith observes:

> This is a prime example of the blending of neoclassical and early romantic ideals, where the pursuit of harmony and solidarity is combined with an appreciation for the picturesque, the distinct, and the exotic (Smith, 2003).

The effort to recreate a historical narrative is, in part, an attempt to assert continuity, sometimes fabricating certain elements of authenticity to achieve this goal. This is particularly evident in the efforts to unify the identities of the Anglo-Norman settlers and the Gaels (Smith, 2003).

Thinkers like Charles O'Connor, Sylvester O'Halloran, and Charles Vallancey framed a continuous history of the Irish, emphasizing their distinct lineage and the island's isolation as a factor in developing a unique society. They argued that Ireland had played a special role in the early history of the Atlantic Archipelago (sometimes called the British Isles) despite its geographical isolation. The political implication was that the revival of Irish history required the Irish to set aside ethnic and cultural divisions in favor of a unified identity based on "authentic" origins. Sylvester O'Halloran, as cited by Smith, believed that the Irish needed to embrace their "common descent" and recognize that their identity had been sustained by the "holy island" they had inhabited for centuries. They were motivated to discover the "life spirit" that had carried them through numerous hardships. This historical and geographical narrative would ultimately shape Irish nationalism (Smith, 2003).

The Irish view of their land as sacred, an ancestral homeland with a pervasive Gaelic culture, provided a narrative of continuity that helped unify their national identity. While some historical accounts emphasize political disunity and internal strife, Ireland's relatively small size and lack of significant geographical barriers facilitated a shared cultural legacy and common heritage. Smith notes that other forces, such as Saint Patrick's mission, the system of brehon law (the pre-Norman legal system), and the influence of the Irish bards, also played a role in fostering the island's unity. After the Reformation, the common bond of religion and a shared territorial identity ultimately overcame the ethnic divisions between the Old English and the Gaels, particularly in response to the growing Protestant nationalism of the New English settlers (Smith, 2003).

Each of these national origin stories—whether English, Scottish, British, or Irish—becomes intertwined with what Jan Assmann, in *Religion and Cultural Memory*, refers to as cultural memory: a collective memory shaped by traditions that define a people's shared legacy. Assmann builds on Maurice Halbwachs's concept of memory, distinguishing between "lived" memory and tradition, and questioning whether this distinction can be sustained. He suggests that tradition is always embodied in some form, and both individual and collective memory are influenced by cultural practices, symbols, and narratives. The origin stories of these nations in the Atlantic Archipelago are therefore deeply embedded in collective memory (Assmann, 2006).

From Anderson's view of nationalism to Smith's exploration of the role of religious beliefs in shaping national identities, a framework for understanding the competing nationalisms of Irish Protestants and Catholics begins to emerge. However, as the case of Ireland demonstrates, identity is always fluid and contested.

Building on Anderson's analysis of nationalism and Smith's exploration of religious inspiration and the concept of ethnic election in national origin stories, we can begin to understand how the Protestants and Catholics of Ireland—particularly in the influential British settlement of Ulster—shaped their competing national identities. However, to fully grasp the complexity of this ethnoreligious divide, we must consider the ethnic dimensions of denominationalism. While this has been briefly addressed in relation to the Protestant alignment with the Enlightenment, capitalism, and print capitalism, a deeper exploration of how these competing identities were forged within the Christian context is necessary for a more complete understanding of ethnoreligiosity in Ireland. Additionally, it is important to recognize that identities shaped by mutual opposition can still be deconstructed, reinterpreted, and reconstructed in new and creative ways.

Denominationalism

As part of this chapter's focus on ethnoreligiosity, the next section examines denominationalism, with an emphasis on the ethnic dimensions of religious separation and group identity. A key resource for this analysis is H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Social Sources of*

Denominationalism, in which he argues that attempts to define churches purely by doctrine or to view church disunity from a strictly theological perspective are “artificial and fruitless.” Instead, Niebuhr contends that history, sociology, and ethics offer a more comprehensive understanding of denominational differences. This approach, grounded in cultural frameworks, provides a valuable perspective on ethnoreligiosity. As Niebuhr observes, “Denominational Christianity—that is, a Christianity which surrenders its leadership to the social forces of national and economic life—offers no hope to the divided world… But it is also the road to the eternal values of a Kingdom of God that is among us” (Niebuhr, 1929). Sociological analysis of religion differs significantly from theological analysis. To understand denominationalism in context, it is not enough to focus solely on doctrinal disputes or different interpretations of scripture. Such an approach may even obscure the roots of ethnoreligious conflict. Instead, we must consider the shared communal anxieties that fuel religious separatism, particularly in the case of sectarianism. As Niebuhr explains:

> There are social forces that aid in developing class and the schism of churches. Economic factors are the most powerful, but not the sole, source of denominationalism. In some cases, particularly with cultural conflict, economic factors may exist in context of ethnic or political division or denominationalism may simply be more defined by those social factors (Niebuhr, 1929).

The ethical divergence within colonial Christianity is a critical issue, especially in how Christianity was often used to justify empire-building and colonialism. As Niebuhr points out, Christianity often thrived by deviating from the teachings of its founder. He argues that throughout history, Christianity found ways to reconcile its doctrines with social evils such as war, slavery, and inequality, often aligning itself with the power structures that perpetuated these wrongs. For instance, Christian doctrines were sometimes used to legitimize the Roman Empire’s conquest and expansion. Rather than challenging imperial power, Christianity adapted to it, conveniently overlooking the deeper ethical teachings of Christ when they conflicted with the needs of political or economic power. Despite numerous biblical references opposing empire and exploitation, Christian doctrine was often employed to justify colonialism and capitalistic exploitation (Niebuhr, 1929). This inconsistency is reflected in the different ethical stances held by various Christian denominations.

Niebuhr also notes a connection between specific religious denominations and ethnic groups. He points out that Protestantism has traditionally been associated with Northern

European populations, such as the Anglo-Saxons, Germans, and Scandinavians, while Catholicism is more closely linked with Southern Europeans, especially those from the Mediterranean. However, Ireland and Scotland challenge this generalization, as they are predominantly Catholic yet still align with the broader Northern European context. This distinction underscores how religious affiliation in Europe has historically been intertwined with ethnic and geographical identities, creating a divide between the Protestant "North" and Catholic "South." Such a division imbues denominationalism with an ethnic dimension, where religious identity becomes closely tied to cultural and racial perceptions

Historically, groups such as the Irish were racially othered in England, despite being classified as "white" by modern standards. Anglo-Saxon English perceptions of the Irish were often condescending, viewing them as primitive or even "savage" — not solely because of their Catholicism, but also due to broader cultural differences. This racialization of the Irish highlights how religious divisions were often intertwined with ethnic and cultural distinctions, making these separations not merely theological but deeply rooted in perceptions of difference and otherness (Niebuhr, 1929).

Niebuhr also highlights the ethnic character of certain Protestant denominations, such as the Scotch-Irish and Scottish Presbyterians, or the Lutherans of Scandinavia and Germany. This suggests that religious denominations are not just expressions of theological belief but are also closely tied to ethnic identity, reinforcing the idea that the religious divisions in Northern Ireland have an ethnic dimension. In other words, religious and ethnic identities often intersect, shaping the social and political dynamics of regions like Northern Ireland. In Niebuhr’s words:

> …religion is [an]... important factor in the preservation of racial character. However, just as quickly as the religious character of the state was consummated, the universal empire was propagated, pushing for the establishment and maintenance of a universal culture. This is true of Roman imperialism as much as it is of British colonialism. Instead of transforming the Graeco-Roman world, Christianity was absorbed by it (Niebuhr, 1929).

Christianity’s social impact is deeply tied to the way it has historically interacted with societal structures. Niebuhr suggests that the earliest divisions within the Church often mirrored the social and political tensions of the Roman Empire’s provincial divisions

(Niebuhr, 1929). These divisions were not merely theological but were rooted in the broader social landscape of the time, reflecting localized conflicts and the power dynamics of the Empire.

` The association of Christianity with social revolution, particularly its emphasis on the meek and the virtues of the poor, has led some theorists to view it as inherently "proletarian." Nietzsche's infamous characterization of Christianity as "the religion of slaves" reflects this perspective. However, Niebuhr challenges this view, noting the modern connection between Protestantism and capitalism. He argues that Protestantism, especially through its development in Calvinism, aligns with capitalist values, a point also emphasized by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber suggests that, unlike in the Middle Ages when making money was viewed as morally questionable, Protestantism fostered a spirit compatible with the ethos of capitalist society. This is evident in the higher representation of Protestants among industrialists, financiers, and traders, as compared to Catholics (Weber, 1905). In Ireland, these divisions were reinforced by a caste system along religious lines, with Protestant settlers and their descendants maintaining control over the wealth and land they had seized.

Niebuhr also observes that the religious needs of the bourgeoisie differ greatly from those of the working class. Bourgeois churches tend to be more individualistic, reflecting values of personal responsibility and success or failure, which are central to capitalist society. In contrast, the working class, both historically and today, is more accustomed to collective labor and cooperation. This results in a religious divide, where Protestantism—particularly Calvinist-influenced strains—emphasizes individual merit and the ethics of family life. Niebuhr argues that the bourgeoisie often finds their "social satisfaction almost limited to this group," leading to a more personal, family-centered religious experience (Niebuhr, 1929).

This distinction between bourgeois and working-class religious expressions is further compounded by the caste-like structure established by the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. The Protestant Ascendancy reinforced a social hierarchy that solidified Protestant control over economic and political power, particularly in relation to the Catholic majority. This institutionalized division entrenched class and ideological differences, with the Protestant elite maintaining their dominance through a combination of landownership, wealth, and religious authority. Consequently, the ideological divide between Protestant and Catholic communities deepened, with Protestant-aligned parties generally less focused on addressing class inequality, while Catholic-aligned parties championed workers' rights and social justice. Thus, the religious and social hierarchies constructed by the Protestant Ascendancy played a significant role in reinforcing the class and ideological divides that remain evident in the political landscape of Northern Ireland.

The Catholic Civil Rights Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s was marked by a strong class division. While poor Protestants certainly existed, their political representation was often limited, whereas the Catholic movement framed its struggles around issues of class inequality. This suggests that religious and cultural identity in Ireland is deeply intertwined with class, with Catholic politics addressing the concerns of the working class in ways that Protestant politics often did not.

These denominational divisions also play a significant role in individual identity, especially in how people navigate their relationships with their communities, families, and broader society. For individuals from mixed-religious backgrounds, this can lead to a hybridization of cultural influences, ideologies, and political affinities. Such individuals may find it more difficult to navigate identity politics, as they must contend with multiple, often conflicting, cultural and religious influences. These complexities of identity are shaped by the historical caste structure that defined Irish society, where religious affiliations often overlapped with class and political divisions.

Alastair Heron highlights that the very existence of separate churches in Northern Ireland is a key factor in the challenges faced by mixed marriages (Heron, 1977). The division itself, he argues, creates a social environment where mixed partnerships are fraught with tension. Terence P. McCaughey, citing Ernst Troeltsch’s distinction between the Church and the sect, further illuminates how denominationalism shapes social divisions. Troeltsch differentiates the Church as an institution of grace and salvation, while the sect is a voluntary society built around a shared sense of "new birth." This distinction shows that denominations are not just theological but also socially and ethnically coded, providing frameworks for understanding identity, origin, and class (McCaughey, 1993). Thus, denominationalism in Ireland is not just a matter of religious belief but also a defining feature of social and ethnic life.

Secularization

The ongoing process of secularization has not diminished the role of ethnoreligiosity; instead, it has transformed its manifestation and, in some cases, made it more pronounced, particularly in areas of social conflict. This section explores how secularization has paradoxically reinforced the ethnic dimensions of religious identity. While secularization is advancing globally, its impact has been slower in Ireland compared to its neighboring countries. In many cases, religiosity remains tied to traditionalism and dogmatism, with public expressions of religion—particularly within churches and religious communities—often in tension with the individualistic tendencies of modernity (Karpov et al., 2012).

In Ireland, generational pressures to uphold tradition and religiosity take on distinct political and social dimensions. As highlighted in the booklet *Mixed Marriages in Northern Ireland: Institutional Responses*, even when neither partner in a mixed-religion marriage adheres to the religious beliefs of their family or community, such unions often face significant challenges across the sectarian divide (Morgan et al., 1996). Secularization has contributed to reinforcing religion as a marker of cultural identity. The concept of secular Catholicism or secular Protestantism might seem foreign to outsiders, but in the ethnoreligiously divided context of Ireland—particularly in the North—these forms of secular religious identity have become somewhat normalized.

On a broader scale, Karpov et al. (2012) discuss how religion plays a crucial role in the “reconstitution of ethnic solidarities in modern, secularized societies.” Citing Taylor, they note that the decline of the ancient régime and its “theocratic, vertically, and hierarchical” structure marked the beginning of the "Age of Mobilization," a period characterized by the breakdown of traditional religious orders. In this new era, religion became increasingly used to foster horizontal societal integration, particularly through ethnonational solidarities. This role of religion in shaping national and ethnic identity has continued into late modernity (Karpov et al., 2012).

The fusion of ethnicity and religion, though predating secularization, has gained new momentum in secularized societies. As Karpov et al. argue, secularized societies have only strengthened this connection, particularly in contexts where individual religious piety may be relatively low. Even in profoundly secular societies like those in Western Europe, religion continues to serve as an anchor for ethnic identity. While Ireland’s secularization process may differ from its neighbors, it is undeniable that secular forces are increasingly at play on the island.

The decline in religious observance across both the Republic and Northern Ireland can be linked to multiple factors, including Western secularization trends, growing distrust in religious institutions, and the ongoing effects of sectarian conflict. A significant portion of those distancing themselves from religion view the church's role in perpetuating sectarian divisions as a contributing factor to their departure from faith (NIMMA, 2008). Survey data, such as the 1991 Northern Ireland Social Attitudes (NISA) survey, reveals a notable decrease in religious adherence over time. In that survey, 90 percent of Catholics and 69 percent of Protestants identified as regular churchgoers, but by 1993, these numbers dropped significantly, with only 45 percent of Church of Ireland members and 52 percent of Presbyterians still identifying as frequent churchgoers (Morgan et al., 1996). More recent surveys, like the 2016 Life and Times survey, show that 19 percent of participants identified as non-religious, with Catholic and Protestant affiliations continuing to decline as primary identifiers (ARK, 2017).

Despite this decline, Karpov et al. (2012) stress the continued importance of religion in shaping national identity. They cite Casanova's work, which builds on Anderson's ideas of imagined communities, stating that religion remains a vital tool in constructing national identities, even in secularized contexts. Churches, in particular, function as "representations of the imagined national communities," creating a powerful overlap between religious and national identities. As a result, even when individuals and communities are not particularly religious, they still perceive their faith as crucial to their ethnic belonging. These beliefs reflect social imaginaries—or, in Durkheimian terms, collective representations—rather than the actual practice of religious belief (Karpov et al., 2012).

The blending of ethnicity and religion becomes even more pronounced in post-secular societies, where traditional religious authority is weakened, yet ethnic identity remains deeply tied to religious symbols and practices. Karpov et al. reference the work of Hervieu-Léger, who explores how secularization can lead to the creation of "ethnic religions," in which people identify with a religious tradition without necessarily adhering to its beliefs. This phenomenon is particularly evident in societies where religious authorities respond to secularizing forces by asserting their influence to preserve cultural and ethnic boundaries.

In contexts where ethnoreligious identities are already significant, the arrival of outgroups—through immigration, conflict, or occupation—can further amplify these identities, creating heightened tensions and reinforcing ethnonational kinship. Such social dynamics often lead to an increase in conflicts that are both ethnically and religiously charged (Karpov et al., 2012).

As secularization continues to progress and church attendance wanes, those who remain loyal to religious institutions may feel increasingly threatened and may respond by defining their religious boundaries more strictly (Reaves, 2008). While the rate of mixed marriage in Northern Ireland is rising, the legacy of sectarianism still deeply impacts the lives of couples from different religious backgrounds and their children.

In *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, Tom Inglis discusses how the Catholic Church, and by extension Irish Catholic identity, became inseparable from Irish national identity, particularly under the pressures of English Protestantism. This relationship largely persisted until the late 1990s and early 2000s, when a series of scandals eroded the Church's moral authority. As Inglis observes:

> The notion that the Irish are almost naturally Catholic has become part of what is accurately referred to as the 'simple faith.' The dominance of 'the simple faith' meant that many Irish Catholics did not develop an intellectual interest in, or critical attitude towards, their religion... Much of this can be related to the fact the Church dominated Irish education and was slow to accept or encourage criticism (Inglis, 1998).

The Church's anti-intellectual and anti-critical stance not only fostered a large, devoted following but also reinforced the idea that its teachings were the unquestionable source of moral guidance. While the Church still plays a significant role in Irish education, there has been a growing trend of questioning its authority, particularly regarding its influence on Irish society. Inglis (1998) highlights how the Church demanded reverence and obedience, often dismissing public debate or criticism as "a cancer of criticism and dissent, which is the result of ignorance or downright antagonism." Critiques, especially those from outsiders, were labeled as "unobjective, unscholarly, and out of keeping with the ethos of Irish society." In this context, Irish identity became so closely linked to Catholicism that to abandon Catholic ideology was often equated with losing Irish identity altogether.

Inglis argues that the Catholic Church long held a "moral monopoly" over Irish society, which meant that religious capital—being spiritual and moral according to the Church's dictates—was a vital component of social standing. In Ireland, more so than in many other countries, religious capital carried substantial weight. Religious capital, alongside other forms of capital such as social, cultural, political, economic, and symbolic, shaped one's position in society. Furthermore, these various forms of capital were interconnected; for instance, educational capital often facilitated the acquisition of economic and political power. Thus, for many individuals, the religious capital they gained within the Catholic framework was essential for securing other forms of social standing (Inglis, 1998).

According to McCaughey, the era of Christendom in Ireland is nearly over. While "the vestiges and monuments of Christendom" remain as historical reminders, he argues that the Irish public is "not free to return to the roles of pre-Constantinian sect, national Church, or Holy Roman Empire, even if we wished to." He further points out the irony that those within the Irish Churches who "jealously guard the sacred position of the church(es)" may, in fact, be contributing the most to the secularization of the very institutions they aim to protect. McCaughey asserts:

> If as Christians or groups of Christians, we are to operate within the political arena at all, we must not hanker after models from the past, whether of sect or Church. If we are to avoid being as prescriptive as 'churches' have tended to be, as dismissive of the views of others as 'sects' have usually been, then we must seek new and appropriate ways in which to present in society (McCaughey, 1993).

Over the past decade, Irish society has undergone a significant transformation, marked by the legalization of gay marriage, the legalization of abortion, and increasingly vigorous public debates about the role of the Catholic Church in Irish life. This shift has been particularly visible in the media, where the Church's authority has been critically examined in the wake of multiple scandals involving priests and religious brothers. These scandals not only sparked discussions about celibacy, the role of women in the priesthood, and the decline in vocations, but also initiated a broader reconsideration of the Church's place in modern Irish society (McCaughey, 1993).

Reaves (2008) argues that religiosity in Ireland is in decline due to the Church's inability to adapt to the demands of modern society. The Church's dogmatic, orthodox stances have led to a decline in congregational membership, particularly among younger generations. While many Protestant youth have distanced themselves from religion, those who remain tend to adopt a more conservative approach to faith, influenced by current teachings and ideological exposure within Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, identities that feel under threat often respond by becoming more orthodox in their religious practices (McLaughlin, 2012). Despite this decline in religious participation, those who continue to attend church may feel increasingly defensive about their faith, leading to stricter boundaries. This growing secular

identity has, in some cases, facilitated mixed relationships, particularly when couples are indifferent to the Church's stance on their union. However, Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) has highlighted that working solely outside of the Church's framework to address issues related to mixed marriages and children is unproductive, as much of the conflict is deeply rooted within the churches themselves. As a result, NIMMA has engaged in significant dialogue with church authorities and clergy, urging them to reconsider and adapt their teachings and practices to address the realities faced by interchurch couples (Reaves, 2008).

In the past, conversion rates were higher among individuals in cross-community marriages. However, as more mixed couples choose to remain within their respective traditions, issues like the sharing of the Eucharist have become more prominent. Despite declining church membership, the Church still wields significant influence, making it essential for advocacy organizations like NIMMA to continue engaging with church authorities. NIMMA encourages the Church to reassess its traditions and update its practices to better address the needs of contemporary congregants (Reaves, 2008).

While rates of church attendance and membership have decreased, the number of marriages conducted in registry offices remains relatively low. For those who no longer practice or are less committed to Christianity, civil ceremonies or cohabitation without marriage have become more common. However, there is little data on the growing trend of cohabitation, aside from the broader societal shift toward secularization. In interviews with clergy, some have cited instances where one partner in a relationship is more devout, while the other follows their partner's religious practices, often at the expense of their own personal religious observance (Reaves).

Jeffrey R. Seul, in his article *'Ours Is the Way of God:' Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict,* argues that religion can serve as a primary cultural marker dividing conflicting identity groups, regardless of the strength of their religious commitment. A group's sense of "us" versus "them," or its understanding of who belongs and who does not, often matters more than the level of religiosity or cultural markers that separate the ingroup from the outgroup. This dynamic is particularly relevant when the outgroup is firmly committed to its own traditions. The pressures of competition and conflict can drive the more secular ingroup to cling more tightly to its religious and cultural identity. Even in secularized societies, religious affiliations and ideologies may resurface and play a divisive role, particularly during periods of civil unrest (Seul, 1999).

Secularization has significantly reshaped the landscape of religiosity in Ireland, though its effects are complex and multifaceted. While secularization has led to a general decline in religious observance and institutional authority, particularly within the Catholic Church, it has not eradicated the ethnoreligious divisions that have historically defined Irish society. Instead, secularization has prompted a reconfiguration of religious identity, with religion continuing to serve as a powerful cultural marker, especially in areas where ethnic and religious affiliations remain intertwined. While secularization has eroded some of the power of religious institutions, its impact on solidifying ethnoreligious identity in Ireland remains significant. Religious identity continues to be closely linked to ethnic belonging, and secular forces often amplify, rather than dissolve, these divisions. As secularization progresses, it will likely continue to influence the dynamics of mixed marriages and religious identity, but whether it will foster a more pluralistic society depends largely on broader social engagement and adaptation.

Micro Level: Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is a useful foundation for understanding interpersonal and individual experiences relating to ethnoreligious identity. Psychologists and other social scientists have developed various theories to explain the evolution and social functions of individual and group identity. These theories highlight how efforts to build and preserve secure identities can lead to conflict between distinct groups. Social identity theory, rooted in social psychology, suggests that identity competition—regardless of economic or political factors—is central to the emergence and escalation of intergroup conflict. Both individual and group identity competition stem from human efforts to fulfill basic psychological needs. Religion often satisfies these psychological needs more thoroughly than other cultural identities, offering cosmologies, moral frameworks, institutions, rituals, traditions, and other identity-supporting elements that provide individuals with psychological stability, a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and even self-actualization. As Seul notes, religion's ability to address the "human identity impulse" may explain why intergroup conflict frequently arises along religious fault lines (Seul, 1999).

The social-psychosocial perspective of ethnoreligiosity, framed through social identity theory, operates at what Karpov et al. refer to as the micro level. Social identity theory posits that individuals define themselves through membership in social groups. Karpov et al. cite Stets and Burke, who define a social group as "a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category." Within the framework of social identity theory, ethnoreligiosity represents the intersection of two social identities, or self-categorization, involving two large social groups. Karpov et al. recommend conceptualizing these groups as "imagined communities," a term originally introduced by Anderson to analyze nations and nationalism, and later applied to religions and ethnicities through the work of Casanova. While these groups are "imagined," as Stets and Burke emphasize, social identity theory asserts that these groups are "real for individuals who identify with them to accomplish particular personal and social goals" (Karpov et al., 2012). The language of "socially constructed" and "imagined" should not suggest that such identities are not real. Rather, reality is subjectively interpreted and socially constructed, making these identities both real and social in nature. This aligns with Anderson's point that imagined communities are "imagined" but not fabrications (Karpov et al., 2012).

The process by which individuals choose a group for identification, as explained by Stets and Burke and referenced by Karpov et al., is influenced by what is considered stereotypical and normative within a given culture. They further note that the norms of a culture are reflected in its belief systems, discourses, and ideologies, and individuals are likely to identify with ethnoreligious groups to the degree that these groups are ideologically constructed and membership in them is regarded as conventional. In addition, Hogg, Terry, and White argue that social categorization strengthens the boundaries between groups by creating distinctive stereotypes and perceptions, while also assigning individuals to relevant categories, including themselves. This process of categorization requires a clear distinction between ingroups and outgroups. Karpov et al. also cite Tajfel's idea that belonging to an ingroup carries significant emotional and personal value. The concept of "belonging," which is central to human psychological needs, is a recurring theme in the literature on ethnoreligiosity and social identity theory, emphasizing the deep emotional connection individuals feel toward the social groups they identify with (Karpov et al., 2012).

Social identity theory suggests that religiosity can amplify the emotional significance of social identities and strengthen boundary-keeping. Religion addresses fundamental questions about human existence and sacred values, and when intertwined with ethnicity, it adds a sacred dimension to ethnic identity. This combination makes ethnicity more transcendent, allowing it to retain its importance despite shifting socioeconomic, political, and other circumstances. In times of adversity, this sacred aspect of ethnic identity helps group members preserve high self-esteem and positive collective self-representations. As a result, the fusion of religious and ethnic identity is particularly significant for ethnoreligious groups facing serious social crises or existential threats. Therefore, ethnoreligious identity in conflict and post-conflict areas tends to be expressed more intensely (Karpov et al., 2012).

Ingroup solidarity is strengthened by emotional sentiments, which in turn lead to stricter policing of intergroup boundaries. As the perception of the outgroup becomes increasingly negative, foreign, and hostile, the separation between groups deepens. Karpov et al. also discuss the “presumption of inborn faithfulness,” where the fusion of ethnicity and faith leads to the assumption that members of a particular social group inherently belong to a specific religion, regardless of their personal beliefs or practices. This sense of continuity extends not only to the deceased but also to those born into the group, as they are integrated into the same ethnoreligious identity. However, individuals of the same ethnicity who convert to a different faith may face marginalization based on religious criteria, while those of a different ethnicity may not be fully accepted into the ingroup, even if they convert and strictly adhere to the group's faith. Karpov et al. argue that conversion challenges the fusion of faith and ethnic belonging, forcing individuals to confront collective beliefs that intertwine the two. Although conversions are relatively rare, they serve as a test of the strength of belief systems that conflate religion and ethnicity (Karpov et al., 2012). Historically, during periods when mixed marriages were more common in Ireland, those who converted or failed to convert to marry outside their community were often labeled "turncoats" (McLaughlin, 2015).

As the sacred nature of a group's ethnic identity becomes more entrenched, the group is more likely to perceive itself as possessing unique spiritual values and religious superiority.

This sense of religious superiority emerges from comparisons in which the group views itself as the bearer of true faith, while others are seen as holding false or inferior beliefs (Karpov et al., 2012). Therefore, the legacy of ethnic election plays a crucial role in both individual and group identity formation.

In social psychology, individual and group identities are closely intertwined, with each influencing the development of the other. Several theorists argue that the desire to form a secure sense of self originates from survival instincts present in infancy. Once an individual's basic physical needs are met, more complex needs such as psychological stability, belonging, self-actualization, and self-esteem become more important. These needs are essential for the formation of both individual and group identities (Seul, 1999).

To achieve a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization, individuals work to build and maintain positive identities. Failure to establish a secure identity can lead to significant psychological discomfort, or even a personality breakdown, which is experienced as a threat to survival. The sense of self and the sense of community are intrinsically linked. Individual identity, while fluid and responsive to changing social situations, often maintains a level of stability that provides emotional security. People seek to secure their identity by forming positive social identities and engaging in social interactions (Seul, 1999).

Groups, much like individuals, develop collective goals and purposes that are vital for their survival and identity preservation. Group identity, too, is fluid and dynamic, shaped by historical and social contexts. Intergroup comparison becomes a natural response when defining and assessing group identity, and this comparison often drives competitive behavior. As Seul cites Tajfel and Turner, the desire to improve the ingroup’s position leads to discriminatory behavior. The likelihood of such behavior increases when leaving the group would be difficult or impossible, especially when identity is strongly tied to social constructions like race, ethnicity, and religion. This dynamic is particularly relevant in ethnoreligious groups (Seul, 1999).

While identity dynamics alone can fuel intergroup conflict, the competition for material and social resources also plays a significant role. Comparative social exclusion and economic deprivation are critical factors in intergroup conflict. The disadvantaged group may develop a more positive identity by comparing itself to the socially advantaged group, which can further ignite conflict (Seul, 1999).

While identity dynamics alone can fuel intergroup conflict, the competition for material and social resources significantly contributes to its escalation to direct violence. Groups that feel socially excluded or economically deprived often perceive themselves as marginalized in comparison to more privileged groups, which can deepen existing tensions. This comparative sense of exclusion drives the disadvantaged group to seek a more positive self-image, often by drawing contrasts with the dominant group and framing themselves as morally, culturally, or spiritually superior. This process of "positive distinctiveness" strengthens group identity but can also increase animosity and conflict when these groups feel that their ability to improve their social standing is blocked or threatened by the more advantaged group.

In societies where there are clear divisions between groups, the struggle for access to material and social resources—such as economic opportunities, political power, and social recognition—becomes a focal point for intergroup conflict. The need to safeguard or enhance one's own group identity can lead to the scapegoating or exclusion of the rival group, further entrenching divisions. This dynamic is particularly evident in the history of religious and ethnic conflicts, where identity is often intertwined with access to power, land, and other crucial resources.

In the case of the Catholic and Protestant divide in Ireland, the historical context of the Penal Laws—legal restrictions and discriminatory practices aimed at suppressing Catholic influence and power—created a system of unequal resource distribution and social exclusion. Catholics were marginalized politically and economically, and this deprivation, coupled with religious identity being tightly bound to ethnicity, exacerbated intergroup tensions. As a result, religious and ethnic identities became markers of social division, with each group's identity being reinforced in opposition to the other. In this context, the competition for resources, both material and symbolic, became intertwined with the struggle for recognition, equality, and survival, making the ethnoreligious conflict more intense and persistent over time.

Thus, the Penal Laws created a legal framework for inequality and served as a catalyst for deepening the emotional and ideological divides between Catholics and Protestants. These laws institutionalized economic and political deprivation, making it difficult for the disadvantaged group to break free from the cycle of poverty and exclusion. This economic and social marginalization, coupled with the reinforcement of group identities through religious and ethnic boundaries, made the conflict both a struggle for resources and a battle for self-definition and survival.

When a group's efforts to distinguish itself, whether for social mobility or self-image, are thwarted by an outgroup, animosity and direct conflict are likely to follow. As worldviews, social norms, and expectations collide, group identity becomes a pivotal point of loyalty and even a test of devotion to God. Religious groups typically demand devout commitment from their members, making it challenging to relinquish one's religious identity once it is fully embraced (Seul, 1999).

The interwoven relationship between individual and group identity means that attacks against the ingroup are perceived as personal attacks against individual identity. Consequently, any threat to a group's identity reinforces its solidarity. Social strife exacerbates these dynamics, expanding the rift between groups as each confrontation strengthens the target group's identity (Seul, 1999).

Religion plays a central role in addressing a range of human needs, including those related to social, geographical, cosmological, temporal, and metaphysical dimensions. Because religion often addresses these diverse needs more comprehensively than other identity markers, it becomes a core aspect of one's identity (Seul, 1999). As Seul states:

> Religious meaning systems define the contours of the broadest possible range of relationships—to self; to others near and distant, friendly and unfriendly; to the non-human world; to the universe; and to God, or that which one considers ultimately real or true. No other repositories of cultural meaning have historically offered so much in response to the human need to develop a secure identity. Consequently, religion often is at the core of individual and group identity (Seul, 1999).

According to Hans Mol, a Dutch sociologist cited by Seul, the primary function of religion is to stabilize both individual and group identity. Mol argues that religions and their institutions resist constant change in their social significance, providing individuals and groups with stable and enduring sources for "self-reference." While religions can incorporate new identities or establish new social roles through rites of passage and conversion, they typically encourage stability through the conservation of traditions, such as "doctrine, ritual, moral frameworks, role expectations, and symbols." New ideas are integrated cautiously, and old concepts are amended or reinterpreted only after careful consideration. This process enables individuals to reshape their identities within a predictable, gradually evolving framework of collective meaning. Religion offers both psychological stability and a sense of self by preserving social and cosmic order (Seul, 1999).

Seul also references Hol's theory of objectification, which posits that religion transforms the mundane world into a transcendental reality, making it appear more orderly, timeless, and manageable. This process helps individuals and groups cope with the uncertainties of life. As Hol notes, "'Temporal dislocation remains manageable' so long as orderliness on a grand scale is assured." To position the individual in relation to "time eternal" and to create a sense of connection between past and future, religions rely on "myths of common origin, period rites and feasts, religious cosmologies, and doctrines of salvation." Ethnoreligious myths of origin, as explored by Smith, play a significant role here. Rites of passage serve as important socialization tools, guiding individuals through transitions in role or status. From birth to death—and even beyond—religions have developed rituals that provide security and structure. For example, birth and naming rituals, such as baptism in Christianity, not only assign a religious identity to the individual but also shape their social relationships and sense of self. Marriage ceremonies facilitate transitions into new social roles, and even death rituals provide comfort in the face of mortality (Seul, 1999).

Religious texts and oral traditions, which include myths, songs, prayers, and other forms of lore, further contribute to identity development. These texts impart teachings, beliefs, and social norms, promoting social order, psychological stability, and reinforcing the group's mission. They bolster the group's self-distinctiveness, satisfying individuals' needs for belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. As individuals internalize the group's stories and legacies, they incorporate these into their own identities (Seul, 1999).

Seul also draws upon Jan Assmann's discussion of Maurice Halbwachs' work on memory. Halbwachs argued that memory is shaped through social relationships, thereby forming "our social existence." He emphasized that "individual memory is always social to a high degree (Seul, 1999). Assmann expands this idea, noting that memory is an intermediary phenomenon between individuals, influenced by emotions such as love, attachment, or even hatred and guilt. These emotions help define our memories and give them meaning within a cultural context. Without this social "horizon," memories would lack relevance. This idea reinforces the point that memory and identity are social constructs. Assmann further explains that society, through its norms and values, shapes the human conscience, making our memories inherently linked to the collective (Assmann, 2006).

On a collective level, memory often takes on a political dimension. For instance, events such as the Battle of the Boyne (1690), which are long past, continue to shape collective identities, even when no one alive directly remembers the event. Collective memory, passed down through rituals, memorials, and national holidays, perpetuates the distinctions between winners and losers, victims and perpetrators. In the context of the Irish Protestant-Catholic divide, such memories, often entrenched in public ceremonies and symbols, play a crucial role in maintaining group identity and preserving intergroup conflict (Assmann, 2006).

As Assmann notes, "tradition" serves as a vertical communication system, transmitting information across generations. This process creates "memory aids" and "memory sites" such as monuments, rituals, and customs that help individuals belong to a culture and society. Tradition is not just a personal experience but a collective one, linking individuals to their broader community. Through this interaction, society molds individual identity, providing individuals with the tools to remember, learn, and share in their cultural heritage (Assmann, 2006).

Religious traditions often delineate boundaries, establishing clear ingroup and outgroup distinctions, particularly around concepts like "chosenness" or "doctrines of salvation." These boundaries help individuals and groups maintain a coherent identity, offering absolute answers to complex pluralistic challenges. Religion, thus, often plays a central role in shaping both group identity and broader societal structures. As Seul points out, "Religious traditions often provide ready answers when pluralism or other forms of complexity threaten the established order." These answers typically resist relativism, offering a firm framework for understanding the world. This dynamic helps explain why religion can be used as a political tool, fueling nationalistic movements and defending ethnic or religious identities (Seul, 1999).

In religious contexts, interpretation and analysis of sacred texts are often controlled by religious elites, who possess the authority to define and regulate group boundaries. These elites help maintain both group identity and religious orthodoxy, ensuring that religious and cultural norms remain consistent and relevant (Seul, 1999). However, while religious identity plays a crucial role in structuring conflict, it is not always the direct cause of violence. Rather, religion often provides the emotional and ideological basis for intergroup rivalry, offering individuals and groups a sense of purpose and justification for their actions.

The relationship between religion and conflict is complex, as conflicts involving religious groups often mirror other forms of group conflict—be it ethnic, racial, or national. Economic and political factors such as resource distribution, the presence of political leaders, and international intervention also play a significant role in shaping the outcome of religious conflicts. Seul argues that religion, in and of itself, is not the root cause of conflict; rather, it is the powerful role religion plays in maintaining social identity that often becomes the battleground for intergroup competition (Seul, 1999).

Nationalism, often tied to religious group allegiance, provides an especially powerful context for conflict. As Anderson observes, nationalism often emerges when people feel a loss of meaning, such as the decline of imperial power or hegemonic religion. In such cases, religiously motivated nationalist movements offer a way for individuals to reclaim lost meaning and reassert their cultural identity. While religion may no longer hold the hegemonic position it once did, it remains a potent force in shaping both individual and group identities. Ethnoreligious nationalism, in particular, offers a profound response to questions of continuity, belonging, and identity (Seul, 1999).

Ultimately, religion serves not just as a moral or ideological framework, but as a powerful source of personal and collective identity. It answers fundamental human needs for belonging, self-actualization, and stability, which makes it a key driver of both social cohesion and, at times, conflict. The intersection of religious, ethnic, and national identities, particularly in the context of social and political strife, highlights the deep connection between individual identity, group belonging, and the larger societal forces that shape them. The dynamics of mixed marriages and the resulting families lie at this intersection, where personal identity and group identity are negotiated within the broader context of social conflict (Seul, 1999).

As Anderson notes, the narratives of individual identity, much like national identity, are set in "homogenous, empty time." Autobiographies, for example, are not only personal stories but also reflect broader historical and sociological contexts. They begin with the individual's ancestors, highlighting the social context in which they were formed. These stories are shaped by the collective memory, with significant events like birth and death marking the beginning and end of individual and collective lives. Thus, both individual and national identities are shaped by historical, cultural, and social forces, which influence how we understand ourselves and our place in the world (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson reflects on the nature of personal identity, noting that profound changes in consciousness inevitably lead to amnesia, creating a disconnect from earlier stages of life. He explains that after experiencing the physical and emotional transformations of puberty, it becomes impossible to truly "remember" childhood consciousness. The many years between infancy and early adulthood fade from direct recollection. It is remarkable, he points out, that one needs help to recognize that the baby in an old photograph is actually oneself. This photograph, along with other forms of documentary evidence like birth certificates, diaries, and medical records, creates a semblance of continuity but also highlights the loss of direct memory. From this sense of estrangement, the concept of personal identity arises. Since the continuity of one's life cannot be recalled firsthand, it must be reconstructed through narration (Anderson, 1991). This ties birth to both continuity and collective memory, even to the extent of false memories shaped by the collective (Anderson, 1991).

Anderson describes nations as social entities that exist within the imagination, moving through history and time in a uniform, collective manner. He emphasizes that the members of these societies can be so deeply embedded in their shared context that they can pass each other in the street without personally knowing one another, yet remain connected. This connection, he argues, exists in the minds of individuals who, much like an omniscient observer, perceive all actions happening simultaneously, though the individuals involved may not be aware of each other. Anderson highlights the uniqueness of this imagined world—constructed in the minds of the people—where the sense of belonging and connection is largely shaped by a collective, imaginative understanding of a shared existence (Anderson, 1991).

According to Anderson, identity acts as a rigid ethnic marker because communities are imagined as groups bound by shared experiences and knowledge, despite most members being strangers to one another. Group identity, then, is centered on this shared sense of identity and the common experiences that may come with it. Anderson explains that a nation is "imagined" because even its smallest members will likely never meet or even hear of most of their fellow citizens, yet they still hold the image of communion in their minds. He further clarifies that nations, though large—sometimes encompassing billions—are always limited in their boundaries, which are finite but flexible. No nation perceives itself as encompassing all of humanity, and each maintains a sense of sovereignty (Anderson, 1991).

Nations, Anderson argues, function similarly to individual identity. Both are grounded in an "awareness of being embedded in serial time," which implies continuity and the need for a narrative of identity. However, there is a key distinction between the narratives of individuals and nations. The story of the individual has a clear beginning and end, as they emerge from parental genes and social circumstances, live a brief life, and eventually pass away, leaving behind stories of their influence. In contrast, nations do not have a discernible birth and, if they "die," it is never a natural death (Anderson, 1991).

Given the lack of a specific, time-stamped origin, the biography of a nation cannot be written "down time," or as Anderson puts it, "through a long procreative chain of begettings"; it must be written "up time." According to Anderson, an "up-time" narrative means the nation is defined by deaths, inverting the traditional genealogy by starting with the present as its origin. He references Fernand Braudel's *Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II* to support his point. In Braudel's work, the "deaths that matter" are anonymous events that, when accumulated, allow for the charting of long-term, slow-changing life conditions for millions, where nationality is often the last consideration. Anderson notes that Braudel "remorselessly accumulated details of cemeteries," but his work is not suitable for writing the nation's biography, as these deaths must be remembered and forgotten as "our own" to serve the narrative of the nation (Anderson, 1991). This insight supports the earlier discussion of ethnoreligious grave segregation in Ireland.

The fear of intermarriage in identity-focused, socially segregated communities often stems from concerns about purity. Any notion of purity—whether perceived or real—is threatened when individuals marry, conceive, or raise children who cannot be clearly identified as belonging to one group or another. Adrian Hastings, as cited by NIMMA in *Intermarriage and the Wider Society*, highlights that groups frequently disapprove of or even prohibit mixed marriages due to communal anxieties over the "purity" of race or faith. This tendency effectively excludes large portions of neighboring groups from the possibility of forming a "covenant alliance." When someone challenges the social pact by marrying outside the group, the communities often demand that the individual who married across group lines "invent" a new identity. In such cases, religious marriage is only accepted if the individual converts beforehand (Reaves, 2008). Despite this, identities shaped by mutual opposition remain fluid and can be redefined, reshaped, and adapted to foster a level of cohabitation that transcends tolerance and embraces multiplicity.

Meso Level: Belief Systems

A central aspect of ethnoreligious discourse involves the social coherence of belief systems. Karpov et al. categorize this as the meso-level, which includes “societal subsystems and institutions.” Converse, a primary theorist on the structure and organization of ethnoreligious belief systems, examines the constraints that make belief systems coherent. Karpov et al. argue that social identity theory offers a useful framework for understanding the psychological forces that shape and unify groups' beliefs about ethnicity and religion, transforming them into “coherent syndromes.” Converse suggests that mass beliefs are not typically held together by logical coherence but by psychological and social constraints. While more sophisticated ideologies are usually bound by logic, mass ethnoreligious beliefs address issues emerging from “sociohistorical circumstances,” forming an “ideological syndrome.” Shared historical experiences within ethnoreligious groups often foster a blending of religion and ethnicity (Karpov et al., 2012).

Another factor influencing mass belief systems is the “ideological influence of elites.” Karpov et al. suggest separating the “demand” and “supply” sides in the creation of fused ethnoreligious identities. The demand side includes elements such as the perceived value of ingroup affiliation, the rigidity of ethnoreligious boundaries, and shared sociohistorical experiences. The supply side, however, is shaped by ethnoreligious elites and intellectuals, who create “ideological schemata and discourse patterns” that link ethnicity and faith. These elites, argue Karpov et al., exploit these patterns to reinforce the perceived inseparability of religion and ethnicity within their groups (Karpov et al., 2012).

Ethnodoxy, or ethnoreligious ideologies, is reinforced by both religious and secular elites because they have political motives tied to “mass mobilization along ethnoreligious lines.” To achieve their goals, elites promote narratives that align ethnic loyalties with religious traditions, even if these narratives distort the original religious teachings. Karpov et al. note that elites play a vital role in shaping popular religiosity, which has lasting effects on interethnic, interchurch, and interfaith relations. They also raise a critical question: If most world religions are universalistic and not bound to specific ethnicities, how do these ideologies make exclusive claims to unique religious virtues? And how do these conflicting interpretations coexist (Karpov et al., 2012)?

Karpov and his colleagues answer this question through the concept of popular religiosity. Their key theorist, Lippy, distinguishes popular religiosity from the “central zone of religious traditions,” which is defined by formal “symbols, values, and beliefs.” Popular religiosity, however, is a “subsidiary zone” that is not formally organized, consisting of the beliefs laypeople use to make sense of their lives. While these beliefs may not be officially recognized within religious traditions, they allow for a degree of flexibility, enabling people to combine ideas in a syncretic way that might be rejected by official doctrines. This informal nature of popular religiosity helps bridge the gap between religious traditions and folk ideologies, especially in cases where ethnoreligiosity contradicts formal theologies. "It plays a crucial role in blending ethnicity and religiosity within ideological frameworks that do not theologically support this integration."

The desire for continuity, identity, and belonging underpins ethnoreligiosity from the level of the individual to the nation-state. Ethnoreligious language is embedded in the origins of various nations, such as England, Scotland, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, marking individuals with different affiliations throughout their lives. This social framework supports the persistence of ethnoreligiosity, which, through secularization, is reframed but not destabilized. Ethnoreligiosity is not simply a cause of conflict but often a byproduct of it, particularly in conflict and post-conflict zones.

Religious and civil elites have played a crucial role in maintaining ethnoreligious boundaries for social and political gain. They use their power to solidify these boundaries, shaping group identities to secure political influence. This process is deeply embedded in history, where winners and losers, victors and victims, are collectively remembered through politicized memorials and segregated burial sites. The agency of churches, particularly in enforcing interchurch marriage restrictions, has been significant in reinforcing the ethnoreligious boundaries that define modern-day Ireland. Their role throughout history merits further exploration.

Despite this, identities shaped by mutual opposition remain fluid and can be redefined, reshaped, and adapted. This fluidity fosters a level of coexistence that transcends mere tolerance and allows for the integration and transformation of diverse identities, traditions, and beliefs within a shared, dynamic social fabric.

The Churches Enacting Agency

For Christians, marriage has traditionally been regarded as a matter involving the Church, though this was not always the case. In the early Church, Christians adhered to the matrimonial laws of the Roman Empire, as Rome was the ruling authority, and the legal norms it set were binding. Practices such as the exchange of rings, the bride's veil, and vows all originated from Roman pagan marriage customs. The early Christian perception of marriage as a sacrament, rooted in Jewish tradition, was not legally relevant in the Roman legal system. Following the announcement of a marriage, a procession would take place from the bride's parents' home to the couple’s new home, with a stop at the church for the priest's blessing (Morgan et al., 1996). In Ireland, while the Church’s influence on marriage has persisted, even after the state assumed control and regulated marriage as part of civil law, the process was largely shaped by Catholic or Protestant ideologies and loyalties. To understand the role of churches as agents of ethnoreligious identity—especially in policing mixed marriages—it is essential to examine the historical timeline of conflicting laws and legal cases, particularly those concerning mixed marriages, brought before the Irish courts. Additionally, it is crucial to note that state power in Ireland was not linear: from the twelfth century until 1922, Ireland was under British rule, and after the establishment of the Irish Free State or the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland remained under British control.

Before Ne Temere: Canon Law and the Penal Laws

Two key texts were instrumental in outlining the historical timeline of mixed marriage in Ireland, spanning from before the Reformation to just before the *Ne Temere* decree: *Mixed Marriages in Northern Ireland: Institutional Responses* by Valerie Morgan, Gillian Robinson, and Grace Fraser, and Raymond M. Lee's article, "Intermarriage, Conflict, and Social Control in Ireland—the Decree 'Ne Temere'." The central themes in both texts highlight the competing forces of Irish civil law under the British state, which, following the Reformation, predominantly supported Protestant interests, and Catholic canon law, which was often viewed by Protestants as evidence of Roman foreign influence in Ireland.

Canon Law (*Codex Iuris Canonici*) is a legal framework upheld by the Catholic Church, primarily governing matters of Catholic doctrine and practice, and serves as the foundation for the Church's regulations on mixed marriages. Initially, these laws focused on Catholics marrying non-Christians, requiring that their children be raised Roman Catholic. With the Protestant Reformation, Protestants were treated similarly to non-Christians, and the same rules applied. These religious laws, aimed at discouraging and punishing interchurch marriages and their offspring, stemmed from Roman Catholic theological perspectives. In contrast, anti-mixed marriage legislation enacted by Protestant authorities in Ireland was enforced through the Irish state's parliament during the period of Protestant Ascendancy, which spanned several centuries and left lasting impacts on the Irish psyche. While the role of Catholic authorities in ethnoreligious violence is well-documented, there is less recognition of the abuses perpetrated by Protestant authorities under British rule. The historical context of the Catholic-Protestant divide can also be framed by the Penal Laws, which laid the groundwork for ongoing ethnoreligious conflict (Morgan et al., 1996).

Though the Roman Catholic Church initially viewed marriage primarily as a civil matter outside its practical jurisdiction, as the Eastern Orthodox Church gained increasing authority—particularly with the *responsio ad Bulgarios* of Pope Nicholas I (866 C.E.), which addressed the role of the clergy in officiating marriages—it began requiring a priest to officiate at marriages.

The Western Church, however, did not adopt this requirement until much later, formally recognizing marriage as a sacrament at the Council of Lateran IV in 1215. By the end of the Middle Ages in Western Europe, marriage remained largely a civil matter for common people, but for the nobility, marriage was intricately tied to political and economic considerations. Church authority over noble marriages was more pronounced, as these unions were often used to secure alliances and property. Noble marriages were typically regulated by both civil laws and ecclesiastical requirements, with the Church playing a central role in officiating and legitimizing these unions, unlike the more civil approach to commoner marriages (Morgan et al., 1996).

Before the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church had already established a stance on mixed marriages, rooted in a long-standing tradition opposing unions with non-Christians. As Eoin de Bhaldraithe notes in his article *Mixed Marriages and Irish Politics: The Effect of Ne Temere*, "the canon law of the Middle Ages forbade marriage with heretics unless there was a promise or at least hope of conversion." This rule, originating from the Councils of Laodicea (372 C.E.) and Chalcedon (451 C.E.), was interpreted strictly by medieval canonists, despite the unclear intent of the councils (de Bhaldraithe, 1988).

By the 1500s, the Catholic Church began to express its doctrinal position on marriage more consistently as a sacrament. With the rise of clandestine and ad hoc marriages, the Church became more concerned with regulating its followers' unions. In response, the 19th ecumenical council of the Catholic Church, the Council of Trent (1545–1563), introduced the Tametsi decree to manage clandestine marriages. These unions, which took place without public or ecclesiastical acknowledgment, were still considered valid but sinful. Such marriages could lead to abuses, like a man leaving his first wife (whom he married secretly) and obtaining a second public marriage, which the Church would deem adulterous (Morgan et al., 1996).

To address the issue of clandestine marriages, the Church adapted its customs, requiring couples to exchange vows in front of at least three witnesses—a priest and two laypeople (who later served as the best man and maid of honor in modern ceremonies). This practice was formalized at the Council of Trent in 1563 with the Tametsi decree, which stipulated that marriages must be celebrated according to canonical form. Under this form, a marriage was only considered valid by the Catholic Church if performed in the presence of a parish priest and two or three witnesses (Lee, 1985). However, by this time, Protestant churches had already separated from the Catholic Church and did not recognize the decree’s authority. As a result, Protestant regulation of marriage and related traditions developed separately, often influenced by the non-sacramental view of marriage in many Protestant denominations. In Ireland, the enforcement of the Tametsi decree was inconsistent, with its full implementation occurring gradually in key areas (Morgan et al., 1996).

In countries with Protestant-majority governments, the implementation of the *Tametsi* decree risked conflict between the Catholic Church and civil authorities. Consequently, the decree was promulgated on a parish-by-parish basis rather than across entire regions. In Catholic-majority countries such as Spain and Portugal, the decree was quickly adopted. However, in Protestant-majority areas and mixed regions, its enforcement was either nonexistent or limited to predominantly Catholic areas. In Ireland, *Tametsi* was initially implemented after the Council of Trent in the northernmost ecclesiastical provinces of Armagh and Tuam. It was later extended to Cashel in 1775 and to Dublin in 1778 (Lee, 1985). In 1741, Pope Benedict XIV issued a decree exempting mixed marriages in Belgium and Holland from the decree, allowing marriages not officiated by a Catholic priest to remain valid. This exemption was later extended to Ireland by a Papal rescript from Pius VI on March 19, 1785 (Lee, 1985).

Galway City presented an exception to the *Tametsi* regulations. A warden ruled that the city was nearly independent from the archbishop's authority, allowing mixed marriages to be valid regardless of whether they were officiated by a Protestant or Catholic priest. This led to the formation of the "Galway Convention," where sons followed their father's denomination, and daughters followed their mother's. This arrangement was designed to ensure that land and property remained within the same religious denomination, as men were traditionally the landowners (Morgan et al., 1996).

The Protestant denominations in Ireland, particularly the Anglican Church, held significant influence over both social and legal frameworks, especially during the period of Protestant Ascendancy. This era, from the late 17th century to the 19th century, marked a time when Protestant elites, particularly Anglicans, exercised dominant control over political, social, and legal structures. The Protestant Ascendancy led to a rigid societal hierarchy that marginalized Catholics (and Presbyterians) and shaped the legal landscape regarding religious matters, including mixed marriages. While the regulations on mixed marriages among Protestants were not uniform due to the autonomy of various Protestant groups, there was widespread opposition to such unions, especially between Catholics and Protestants. This opposition was driven by strong theological and sectarian fears, particularly the belief that Catholic laws on marriage threatened Protestant dominance by encouraging interchurch marriages, which could potentially erode the Protestant population over time. These concerns also often led to a decrease in church membership among individuals involved in mixed marriages (Morgan et al., 1994).

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However, it is important to note that the Protestant Ascendancy did not simply marginalize Catholics—it also exerted considerable control over other Protestant denominations, including Presbyterians. While Presbyterians were part of the broader Protestant community, they were often considered subordinate within the Anglican-dominated establishment. The Presbyterian Church, despite being a key Protestant denomination, faced exclusion from political power and significant social discrimination under the Anglican-led Protestant Ascendancy. The Anglican Church's position as the state church in Ireland ensured that Presbyterians, along with Catholics, were politically marginalized, despite their shared Protestant affiliation. Presbyterians, like Catholics, were excluded from many legal and social privileges enjoyed by the Anglican elite. This broader Protestant hierarchy solidified Anglican control while keeping Presbyterians and Catholics in a subordinate position (Inglis, 1999).

In the late 1600s, the Anglican-controlled Irish Parliament enacted the Penal Laws, a series of legislative measures designed to suppress Catholicism and solidify Protestant control. These laws, heavily influenced by the political and religious loyalties of the Anglican elite, sought to maintain their privileged status and prevent a Catholic resurgence. While the primary focus was on limiting the rights and freedoms of Catholics, the laws also marginalized Presbyterians and other non-Anglican Protestants. Although not subjected to the same extreme restrictions as Catholics, Presbyterians faced discrimination, particularly in political and legal matters, as the Anglican Church sought to reinforce its dominance and suppress rival Protestant denominations (Inglis, 1999).

Among the many restrictive measures, the Penal Laws targeted mixed marriages by imposing severe penalties for Catholic-Protestant unions, deepening the divide between the two communities. Catholic marriage practices were heavily regulated, while Protestant marriage laws were enforced through the power of the Anglican Church, deeply embedded in the Irish legal system. These laws also sought to suppress Catholic religious practices, with harsh penalties, including imprisonment and death, for violators, particularly Catholic priests. One extreme proposal from the Irish Privy Council in 1917, quoted by Tom Inglis in *Moral Monopoly*, suggested drastic measures to prevent priests from entering Ireland, including branding them with a red-hot iron or, in more extreme cases, castrating them. Although the English House of Lords ultimately rejected this proposal, it underscores the intense hostility towards Catholicism during the era of Protestant rule in Ireland (Inglis, 1999).

The Penal Laws also effectively severed the Catholic Church in Ireland from its counterparts in other parts of the Roman Catholic world, driving the emergence of some unconventional practices. These laws prohibited Catholics from attending school, traveling abroad, or sending their children for Catholic education. Catholics were forbidden from owning land, bearing arms, holding public office, or engaging in any religious activities associated with Catholicism. Practicing the Catholic faith, including teaching or converting Protestants, was met with severe penalties, including imprisonment or death. Edmund Burke described the Penal Laws as "a machine of wise and elaborate contrivance, as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself" (Sanderson, 1898). These laws were a direct violation of Catholic civil rights.

The Penal Laws sought to secure Protestant Ascendancy, maintaining a dominant class representing Protestant interests while relegating Catholics to a subservient status. Both the Lord Chancellor and Chief Justice declared that "the law does not suppose any such person to exist as an Irish Roman Catholic." These laws were fundamentally class-based, designed to restrict Catholic access to the means of production, thus keeping land in the hands of the Protestant elite (Inglis, 1998). Historian Lecky notes that Catholics were not permitted to buy, inherit, or receive land from Protestants, and faced numerous restrictions on land leases and financial dealings. As a result, Catholic land ownership plummeted from 59% in 1641 to just 14% in 1703 (Inglis, 1998).

After 1698, Catholic priests who were not diocesan clergy faced imprisonment and banishment, with execution as a potential consequence if they returned. Diocesan clergy had to register with the state, and failure to do so led to banishment. A total of 1,089 priests registered, allowing them to conduct Mass and perform other sacramental duties. However, with no priests being trained in Ireland and the state expecting them to die out within a generation, proposals were made to mark or castrate registered priests to prevent them from being replaced. Moreover, magistrates could demand that Catholics over the age of 16 provide details about Mass celebrations and attendees. Enforcement of these laws varied greatly by region (Inglis, 1998).

By 1708, most priests were outlaws for refusing to take the Oath of Abjuration, which denied Catholics the right to the English throne. Without chapels and with priests operating in exile, Mass was often held outdoors at "mass rocks," which remained common places of worship in northern Ireland until the end of the 18th century. In urban areas, affluent Catholic merchants defied the law by holding services in secret locations, often in the rear of houses or behind narrow lanes. This clandestine practice, described by Burke, set Catholic chapels apart from the prominent Protestant churches, which were visibly larger and better maintained. The contrast between Catholic worship spaces and grand Anglican Protestant churches highlighted the marginalized status of Irish Catholics. This legacy of marginalization fostered a determination among later generations of Catholics to invest in building churches as monuments to their faith and respectability. These churches, often designed to appear older than they were, symbolized a reclamation of lost influence (Inglis, 1998).

The Penal Laws also prohibited intermarriage with Catholics, especially when estate ownership was involved. In mixed marriages, children were required to be raised Protestant, directly conflicting with Catholic canon law. Penalties for violating these laws applied to both Catholics and Protestants involved in such unions, though Protestant men were the primary target due to concerns over land, membership, and population decline. The last significant execution for conducting a mixed marriage under these laws occurred in 1726 (Sanderson, 1898).

These laws were specifically aimed at controlling education and religious practices, preventing Catholics from organizing politically or achieving social mobility. Catholics were barred from attending universities, serving as guardians, or opening schools. The law even incentivized the reporting of Catholic educators by offering rewards for identifying illegal "Popish schoolmasters" (Inglis, 1998).

During this time, "hedge-schools" emerged as a form of clandestine education, operating outside the control of the state. While these schools were widespread, their quality varied, and they were generally only accessible to a small, non-Anglican elite, particularly Catholic and Presbyterian children who could afford the fees (Inglis, 1998). Despite being outlawed, these schools fostered collaboration between priests and schoolmasters. Priests were responsible for catechizing, while schoolmasters often handled educational duties. In some cases, schools were held in Mass Houses, and schoolmasters were treated similarly to priests in terms of visitation (Inglis, 1998).

In 1731, a survey revealed the existence of at least 549 illegal Catholic schools in Ireland. In response, the state began establishing Charter Schools, with the primary goal of Protestantizing Irish youth. These schools sought to detach children from their Catholic upbringing by teaching them the English language and Protestant principles. The focus was not on academic education but on "labor and industry," aimed at preventing the "idleness" attributed to the Catholic poor. The Charter Schools were part of a broader effort to increase the Protestant population while preserving the existing social order (Inglis, 1998).

The Protestantization of Irish children could only succeed if they were completely removed from the influence of their Catholic parents. As a result, admission to Charter Schools required Catholic parents to relinquish their children's "bodies and souls," sending them to be "apprenticed out to Protestant families" and forbidding any future communication with their parents. Additionally, nurseries and Foundling Hospitals were established to encourage Catholic mothers to abandon their infants, with the aim of separating them from what were considered "immoral" parents (Inglis, 1998).

Despite facing significant financial hardships, Catholics exhibited remarkable resilience. However, the Charter Schools ultimately failed to achieve their objectives. Even at their height, they likely never enrolled more than 2,000 pupils. While the Charter system's failure was clear, state authorities continued to view moral restraint and education as key to achieving sociopolitical stability, especially in light of the Irish people's determined efforts to educate themselves (Inglis, 1998).

The Act of Union in 1801 placed Ireland directly under British rule. The Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting the Knowledge and Practice of the Christian Religion expressed deep concern over the Irish population, describing them as "bloody and ferocious," retaining the “habits and feelings of savages,” and prone to cruelty despite previous expressions of affection. They argued that immediate action was necessary to introduce rational behavior and Christian principles, believing that the process of civilizing the Irish, though often seen as hopeless, had to begin somewhere (Inglis, 1998).

The Association feared that, without state-controlled Protestant education, “pernicious doctrines of treason and rebellion” would continue to spread among the lower classes through hedge-school masters. Their solution was to establish a more effective system of control, aiming to “civilize and moralize the Irish into the true Christian religion.” Inglis notes that the mission was fundamentally religious, drawing a parallel to later missionary efforts that saw Irish priests, brothers, and nuns spreading across the globe (Inglis, 1998).

Inglis argues that "the social interest of the state in civilizing the Irish cannot be separated from its political interest in disciplining and controlling the population." Akenson, cited by Inglis, supports this by explaining that the establishment of a state system of mass education in Ireland occurred four decades before England or Scotland, driven by the British need to control the Irish people. The British were not interested in Ireland for its resources, as it lacked obvious natural wealth except for some good land, but rather for its strategic position close to France and Spain, which posed a threat to British border security. Over time, various methods were attempted to subjugate the native Irish, such as the seizure of land and the plantation system that rewarded settlers with financial incentives. However, these efforts largely failed, except in the northern province of Ulster (Inglis, 1998).

By the 1820s, the Penal Laws had also begun to fail. The first thorough census in 1821 revealed that the Irish population had increased to 6.2 million, a figure that was over half the population of England and a third of the total population of the Atlantic Archipelago. The

British public continued to view the Irish Catholics as savage and rebellious, posing a threat to Britain's peaceful industrial order (Inglis, 1998).

By the mid-eighteenth century, British authorities admitted defeat in their efforts to abolish Catholicism in Ireland. However, the Protestant Ascendancy remained anxious about its position and assets. According to Inglis, "Any sign of ‘native unrest,’ or even large gatherings of Catholics, even for a pattern or pilgrimage, struck terror in the hearts of Protestants." The British realized that if the higher Catholic clergy were unimpeded, they could suppress sedition and criminal behavior, offering the stability the British sought. Even if Irish Catholics refused to convert to Protestantism, they still required religious guidance to maintain moral discipline and order. As a result, an unusual alliance formed between the British state and the Catholic authorities. Inglis asserts that "As long as the Irish could be dissuaded from bloody rebellion and became civil and disciplined, it did not matter so much who produced the results." This arrangement was acceptable to British Protestants and politicians, though the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland continued to advocate for a return to penal legislation throughout the first half of the nineteenth century (Inglis, 1998).

Catholic bishops and clergy, who consistently called for law and order among their followers, became valuable allies to the British in pacifying the Irish masses. However, by the end of the century, as the population grew rapidly, and in the wake of the French Revolution, Catholic seminaries were closed, halting the supply of Irish priests (Inglis, 1998).

In response, a new idea emerged: the state could benefit by establishing and supporting a college to train Catholic priests in Ireland. In 1795, the Irish state established Maynooth College, the National Seminary, with state subsidies for Catholic priests. On the eve of the college's opening, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Troy, was invited to a dinner at Dublin Castle, marking the first time since the Reformation that a Catholic bishop had dined with the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Four years later, ten bishops, later known as the "Castle bishops," submitted a request to the Irish government for a state subsidy for all Irish Catholic clergy. By 1845, the Irish Catholic Church had become an "independent power bloc," and the British state had entrusted it with the task of "civilizing and socially controlling" the overwhelmingly Catholic Irish population (Inglis, 1998).

The attempt to expel Catholicism from Ireland through mass repression ultimately failed, instead uniting Catholics in their struggle against the state. The Penal Laws were ineffective in preventing the rise of a Catholic urban bourgeoisie, which allied itself with the Catholic Church to maintain "civility, morality, and legitimated status." By the time the British state attempted to control the Catholic bourgeoisie and the Church—both of which had been the primary targets of penal law—it was too late (Inglis, 1998).

From 1750 to 1850, the institutional Catholic Church in Ireland grew considerably. This alliance between the Catholic bourgeoisie and the Church, which had already formed in pre-partition Ireland, would become fully solidified in the new Irish state after 1922. While the Penal Laws temporarily halted Catholic reform, the Church and Catholic population continued to fight for "a Church independent of the state," as encouraged by Rome, and "Rome continued to exert considerable power over the Irish Catholic Church" (Inglis, 1998).

The reforms sought by Rome were often delayed or fragmented in Ireland due to the Penal Laws. In 1741, Pope Benedict XIV acknowledged mixed marriages without Roman Catholic priests in Protestant-governed countries. In 1785, Pope Pius VI further extended Roman Catholic canon law across Ireland, excluding Leinster and Galway, which would join in the next 50 years. However, in the late eighteenth century, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Ossory declared, “Marriage between Protestants and Catholics is unlawful, wicked, and dangerous. The Penal Laws should not be repealed. They act as a deterrent.” Between 1793 and 1833, priests conducting mixed marriages under penal law faced a fine of £5,000 (Sanderson, 1898).

In 1850, the Synod of Thurles issued a decree requiring a Papal Dispensation, a reserved right of the Pope to grant exemptions from Canon Law, and reaffirmed the oath that all children of mixed marriages would be raised Catholic. This clashed with civil law, which recognized paternal supremacy. The Catholic Church decreed that all children from mixed marriages, regardless of which church either parent belonged to, must be raised Catholic. Both parents had to agree to this and sign an authorization in front of witnesses. However, this decree was widely ignored. In 1852, English Roman Catholic bishops proposed that the dispensation or exemption should come from a parish priest rather than the Pope in Rome, a change confirmed by Rome in 1853 (McLaughlin, 2015).

Although not following canonical procedures, the Irish Catholic Church benefited from overlooking mixed marriages by avoiding conflict with civil law. A marriage between two Catholics, performed by a Catholic priest, was civilly valid, but a mixed marriage performed by a Catholic priest was not. According to the Act 12 Geo. 1 c.3 of Parliament, marriages between Catholics and Protestants or between two Protestants officiated by a Catholic priest were considered "null and void." Despite this, evidence suggests that mixed marriages officiated by Catholic priests were surprisingly common (Lee, 1985).

In 1825, Reverend Thomas Castello, a Catholic priest, testified before a House of Lords Select Committee on the State of Ireland, revealing that mixed marriages were "very frequent, even among the lower orders." He emphasized that many Irish Catholics were reluctant to marry in Protestant churches and preferred to have their mixed marriages officiated by a Catholic priest. The Anglican Archbishop of Dublin supported Castello's claims, noting that these civilly invalid marriages were indeed common, though he argued that Catholic clergy were eager to assist in such unions for the potential of proselytizing (Lee, 1985).

Bishop Moriarty, in 1866, testified before the Royal Commission on Laws of Marriage, stating that while he wished the law prohibiting mixed marriages by Catholic priests would be repealed to place Catholic priests on equal legal standing with Protestant clergy, he personally found it convenient. He explained, "If I were to consult my own feelings and convenience I should not wish for any change in the law because it is very convenient for me, wishing as I do to prevent such marriages, to be able to say to parties seeking our ministrations, ‘No, the marriage will not be valid in law, and I shall be subjected to a severe penalty…’" (Lee, 1985). The Commission recommended revising the law, which was changed in 1870, though the Church’s stance on marital validity remained unchanged until the promulgation of *Ne Temere* in 1908 (Lee, 1985).

Bishop Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin was asked by the Select Committee on the State of Ireland whether there were any prohibitions on Catholics marrying Protestants from the Council of Trent. He responded that no such legislation existed, and he considered mixed marriages valid, even those officiated by Protestant ministers. He asserted that Catholic clergy merely advised, but did not insist, that children from such marriages be raised Catholic. However, Archbishop Murray of Dublin, in 1825, acknowledged that the Catholic Church disliked mixed marriages and stated that "whenever we allow them, it is always as far as I know with the condition that the children of the marriage are to be educated in the Catholic religion" (Lee, 1985).

Reverend Mortimer O'Sullivan, an Anglican clergyman, added support to Archbishop Murray's sentiment. He claimed that the Catholic Church had sometimes withheld rites from Catholics in mixed marriages when the children were raised Protestant, asserting, "And in that way, very materially, and perhaps principally, the number of Roman Catholics has of late years increased. For it hardly ever fails—even among the lower orders—that the Protestant yields, especially when the Roman Catholic is female, and the children are, with very few exceptions, brought up as Roman Catholics" (Lee, 1985).

It has been suggested that in nineteenth-century Ireland, in mixed marriages, it was common practice for boys to be raised in the father's religion and girls in the mother's religion. When asked about this practice by the Select Committee, O'Sullivan, a member of the Orange Order, denied familiarity with it and believed priests would condemn such practices. O'Sullivan's response likely stemmed from the Synod of Thurles' 1850 decree, which emphasized procuring promises to raise children Catholic (Lee, 1985).

However, this gendered religious inheritance was also practiced across wider Europe and advocated by some Catholic theologians, who may have been "bowing to local custom," according to Lee. This practice was denounced by Pope Benedict XIV. Lee further explains that it likely arose in peasant families to maintain land ownership within both Catholic and Protestant communities. Given the anxieties surrounding mixed marriages and the religious identity of children, this gendered inheritance method provided stability and safeguarded land ownership, particularly in regions like Galway (Lee, 1985).

In 1906, just before *Ne Temere* was enacted, the decree *Provida Sapientique* (Latin for "forethought") reaffirmed that mixed marriages would remain valid if officiated by a Protestant minister (McLaughlin, 2015). However, in 1907, Pope Pius X issued the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* ("Feeding the Lord's Flock"), which included a strong condemnation of modernism, asserting, "The Protestant error took this course first; then follows the error of the modernists; soon atheism makes its entry" (de Bhaldraithe, 1988).

Eoin de Bhaldraithe quotes several Anglicans on their perception of Pope Pius X's anti-modernist stance. One Anglican observed that the latter part of the nineteenth century saw heightened authoritarianism in the Roman Catholic Church, exemplified by the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), the declaration of Papal Infallibility (1870), and the condemnation of modernism (1970). Another Anglican noted that the basic Roman Catholic policy from 1820 to 1960 was "to recapture qualities of a golden age in Christendom," a view shared by Celtic revivalists who sought a return to ecclesial agency, empowerment, and authority. It is significant that Pope Pius X's condemnation of modernism occurred in the same year as *Ne Temere's* promulgation, and de Bhaldraithe concludes that the strict application of *Ne Temere* in Ireland was influenced by the papal policy of the time. He also notes, "It was Pope Pius X's personal decision that applied the decree to Ireland" (de Bhaldraithe, 1988).

These barriers, though historically entrenched, must be understood in their specific religious and political context, as they reflect the broader socio-cultural and ecclesiastical dynamics of the time. Overcoming such divisions, while challenging, is possible when viewed through the lens of historical change, as shifts in social, religious, and political landscapes have continually reshaped attitudes toward mixed marriages and religious identity.

The Impact of Ne Temere

In 1907, *Ne Temere* was decreed under Pope Pius X, a papal document that has been widely misunderstood and criticized for its alleged consequences. Contrary to popular belief, *Ne Temere* did not mandate that mixed-marriage children must be raised Catholic. The misconception that the Catholic priest would require the Protestant partner to promise to raise the children Catholic is inaccurate, as the decree itself never addresses the religious upbringing of children. In fact, the requirement for such promises predated *Ne Temere* within canon law. The primary focus of the decree was to reinforce the stipulations of the earlier *Tametsi,* which stated that a valid Catholic marriage must be celebrated before a Catholic priest with two witnesses (Jameson, 2014).

Some accounts, such as the article *"Mixed Marriages: Can the Problem Be Solved?"*, have inaccurately claimed that non-Catholic partners were brought to trial and convicted for not upholding the promises to raise their children Catholic, despite these promises existing prior to *Ne Temere* ("Mixed Marriages: Can the Problem Be Solved?", 1975). While the decree did give additional weight to the Catholic Church's requirement regarding the promise to raise children Catholic in mixed marriages, this was an indirect consequence. *Ne Temere* sought to regulate clandestine marriages by making the presence of a Catholic priest and two witnesses a necessary condition for a valid Catholic marriage (Lee, 1985). The document briefly mentions mixed marriages, stating that Catholic laws are binding on those who marry non-Catholics, even after receiving a dispensation for such a union, unless the Holy See decrees otherwise for a specific region (Lee, 1985).

Though the document does not mention the promises directly, it made clear that for a mixed marriage to be valid by Catholic law, it had to be officiated by a Roman Catholic priest. Even though such marriages were not invalid merely due to being mixed, a dispensation was required, and the promises to raise the children Catholic had to be obtained. Thus, as de Bhaldraithe, citing Lee, notes, “in practice, the promises became necessary for validity” (Lee, 1985).

The common misconception in Protestant communities—and elsewhere—is that *Ne Temere* introduced the idea of a written promise from the Protestant partner to raise the children Catholic. However, as Raymond M. Lee clarifies, Ne Temere did not introduce the idea of promises regarding child-rearing; this requirement had existed since the eighteenth century. The promises were not always consistently enforced in Ireland. Lee also notes that while the number of mixed marriages between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Ireland was small compared to total marriages, the rules governing such unions were of considerable social significance (Lee, 1985). According to Paul McLaughlin at NIMMA, the legacy of Catholicism as the “one true Church” and the strictures placed on mixed marriages helped ensure that they remained rare. Between 1943 and 1947, surveys recorded that mixed marriages constituted just one percent of total marriages (McLaughlin, 2015). When *Ne Temere* was promulgated, it was quickly applied to Ireland, unlike many previous papal decrees, and its implications were not immediately understood. Due to the restrictions of Catholic canon law, conversion became a common solution. In 1901, the Protestant population in Northern Ireland was 343,000, but by 1961, this number had dropped to 144,000 (“Mixed Marriages: Can the Problem Be Solved?”, 1975).

Soon after Ne Temere’s publication, the infamous 1908 case of Mrs. Agnes McCann and Mr. Alexander McCann highlighted the tension between the decree and Protestant sensibilities. The McCann case and the broader public response to Ne Temere have shaped the discourse surrounding interchurch marriages between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland (de Bhaldraithe, 1988).

Alexander McCann, a Catholic from Belfast, married Agnes McCann, a Presbyterian, in her church. After the birth of two children, the local Catholic priest encouraged Alexander to have the marriage validated by a Catholic ceremony. Agnes refused, leading Alexander to leave her, taking their children and their belongings. The case was brought to Parliament, sparking nationwide debates in both the press and political arenas (de Bhaldraithe, 1988). This public controversy reinforced the historical reality of Catholic laws attempting to restrict or discourage mixed marriages, and the Protestant panic that followed.

In the early 20th century, Presbyterians in Ireland initially supported Home Rule, driven by shared grievances with Catholics, particularly the disenfranchisement they both experienced under the Protestant Ascendancy. The Protestant Ascendancy, a system of political and social dominance by the Anglican elite, had long marginalized both Catholics and non-Anglican Protestants, including Presbyterians. Presbyterians, like Catholics, faced exclusion from political power and legal rights, which fueled a desire for greater political influence and equality within a system that had long sidelined them in favor of the Anglican ruling class. This shared experience of marginalization led many Presbyterians to initially align with Catholics in support of Home Rule, seeking a more inclusive and just political system that promised shared rights and financial equality (Lee, 1985).

However, over time, economic success in Ulster, largely driven by Presbyterians, played a critical role in the emergence of a pan-Protestant identity. The association of Protestantism with economic prosperity, particularly in the industrial and commercial sectors of Ulster, led to a gradual reconciliation between Presbyterians and Anglicans. By the 19th century, Presbyterians had forged a thriving industrial economy, which they associated with British governance. This economic success, in contrast to the underdevelopment in Catholic-majority areas, contributed to a shift in attitude, with many Presbyterians seeing their future tied to British rule and their prosperity linked to the British capitalist system (Dingley, 2023). In contrast, Catholic Ireland remained economically impoverished despite some government attempts at reform. Dingley argues that while the Catholic Church initially supported efforts for integration, it gradually shifted its stance, adopting a position of cultural and social separation from Protestants. Central to this approach was the enforcement of policies on mixed marriages, which became a key area of focus in maintaining this separation.

This division, as exemplified by the Penal Laws, according to Dingley, contributed to the partition of Ireland in 1921, creating Northern Ireland as part of the UK, while the rest of

Ireland developed a Catholic-driven nationalism that opposed British Protestant identity (Dingley, 2023).

The *Ne Temere* decree, issued by the Catholic Church in 1908, exacerbated tensions between Catholics and Protestants, particularly in Ulster. The decree required Catholic marriages to be conducted in the Catholic Church, and in the case of mixed marriages, it declared the union invalid unless the children were raised as Catholics. This was perceived by many Protestants as an infringement on their rights, particularly since the Presbyterian Church had historically been responsible for officiating interdenominational marriages. Presbyterians, who had already experienced long-standing marginalization, now saw *Ne Temere* as a direct threat to their autonomy and their rights to conduct religious ceremonies.

The McCann case, which followed in 1910, became a focal point of the Protestant response to the decree. Mrs. McCann, a Protestant woman married to a Catholic man, was informed by her husband's priest that her marriage was invalid due to *Ne Temere*. Her refusal to remarry in the Catholic Church led to mistreatment by her husband, and the case sparked widespread Protestant outrage. Reverend William Corkey's letter detailing Mrs. McCann's suffering resonated with many, culminating in public protests in Belfast, Dublin, Edinburgh, and London. This "moral panic" over the implications of *Ne Temere* galvanized the Protestant community, leading to the formation of committees and the involvement of political figures like J.H. Campbell, a Unionist MP. The case intensified Protestant concerns over the Catholic Church's growing influence and its potential to infringe upon their rights, further solidifying the division between Protestants and Catholics (Lee, 1985).\

The imposition of Ne Temere, compounded by the McCann case, undermined the possibility of a united front between Catholics and Presbyterians in Ulster. Although both groups had previously shared common grievances under the Protestant Ascendancy, the decree shifted the power dynamics, deepening the divide between them. The Catholic Church's growing stance of cultural and social isolation led many Presbyterians to perceive the Church as an external threat to their rights and autonomy. As Dingley argues, this legal and societal rift, reinforced by both Protestant and Catholic authorities, played a crucial role in the partition of Ireland in 1921, with Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom while the rest of Ireland embraced a Catholic-driven nationalism that opposed British Protestant identity (Dingley, 2023).

Though the Penal Laws were officially repealed in the 19th century, their legacy endured, leaving a lingering sense of bitterness and resentment, chiefly among Catholics, who carried the weight of centuries of oppression in their collective memory. Over time, the Protestant community in Ireland, especially in Ulster, coalesced around a pan-Protestant identity that was not only politically but also economically motivated. The economic success of Presbyterians in Ulster, combined with the social isolation promoted by the Catholic Church, helped to secure the loyalty of many Protestants to the Union, further solidifying the divide that would lead to the partition of Ireland (Dingley, 2023).

While it is unclear whether Corkey's account of Mrs. McCann's suffering was exaggerated, it is evident that the McCann case became a significant rallying point for Protestant opposition to *Ne Temere.* Corkey and others portrayed the decree as an overreach by the Catholic Church, challenging both British civil law and Protestant autonomy. As Corkey stated in Edinburgh, the decree raised the critical question of whether British or Papal law held supreme authority over marriage matters. For many Protestants, *Ne Temere* represented the Catholic Church asserting its influence over both religious and civil matters. Corkey and other Protestant leaders argued that the decree threatened British sovereignty, with J.H. Campbell calling it "an act of intolerable aggression by a foreign power." For them, *Ne Temere* was not just an infringement on the sanctity of marriage, but also a challenge to the authority of the British state (Lee, 1985).

The McCann case and the Protestant response to *Ne Temere* reflected broader anxieties about Catholic influence and control over civil matters, which deepened the divisions between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, particularly in the early twentieth century. *Ne Temere* became a symbolic issue representing the struggle for political and religious autonomy, with lasting consequences for interchurch relations in Ireland.

At the time, similar cases were reported in other parts of Ireland and even England. One such incident involved the alleged abduction of the daughters from a mixed marriage in Kilmurray, Co. Cork. Although Lee argues that these cases, like the McCann case, were based on second-hand accounts, their sensationalized portrayal in the media—exploiting widespread anxieties—cannot be overlooked (Lee, 1985).

However, Protestants were not the only group shaping the media narrative surrounding the McCann case. By this time, Catholics in Ireland had developed a well-organized community with access to media outlets, allowing them to offer a counter-narrative. As a result, the McCann case became a public controversy, marked by opposing interpretations of the events. Nationalist MP Joseph Devlin, representing West Belfast, presented a letter in the House of Commons purportedly written by Alexander McCann. Later, John Dillon read the letter, in which McCann claimed that his marriage had been unhappy due to his wife's aggressiveness and interference in his religious life (Lee, 1985). The letter read:

> …there was never a day passed without a dispute. For instance, she would have meat ready for Fridays. She would put back the clock and make me late for Mass. She ridiculed the priest and religion, cursed the Pope, and sang hymns all day (Lee, 1985).

In this letter, Mr. McCann explained that he left his wife because their marriage had become intolerable, and he denied that his priest had encouraged him to do so. Devlin, however, believed that the McCann case had been politicized. During his campaign, he claimed that posters had been put up in his constituency reading, "Will you vote for Devlin and have your Protestant children kidnapped by the Priest?" Nationalists seized on Mrs. McCann's refusal to name the priest who had visited their home following the promulgation of Ne Temere, using this to further fuel their opposition. Devlin also presented statements from priests in McCann's parish denying the allegations, and he threatened legal action against anyone who implicated any priests (Lee, 1985).

Since *Ne Temere* was promulgated, the Liberal Government had remained in office, supported by Irish Nationalists at Westminster, a relationship further solidified after the 1910 General Election. As a result, the government was less susceptible to Unionist pressure. In response to the large-scale protests, the government reaffirmed the position of the Lord Lieutenant. In the House of Commons, Chief Secretary for Ireland, Birrell, reiterated that the McCann case was a civil matter over which authorities had no jurisdiction. Despite granting permission for the police to investigate Mr. McCann's whereabouts, the Crown authorities showed little interest in further involvement. As Lee notes, Birrell framed the issue as primarily concerned with Mrs. McCann's specific plight, rather than addressing the wider implications of the decree. According to Lee, it also served as an attempt to promote the idea that strict adherence to existing legal norms could adequately address the problem that had emerged (Lee, 1985).

Birrell argued that Mrs. McCann could have sought quick and adequate justice through an application to the Court of Chancery but chose to take her case to the Lord Lieutenant instead. He accused those who had assisted Mrs. McCann of putting politics ahead of her best interests. Lee concludes, in this light, "The campaign against *Ne Temere* was, therefore, merely a maneuver by Unionists to incite opposition to Home Rule and…should not be taken as a genuine basis for concern about the decree" (Lee, 1985). Ultimately, Mrs. McCann was supported by donations and collections at protest meetings, but she was never able to recover her children.

The framing of the McCann case as a consequence of Ne Temere helped fuel a moral panic, which played a key role in the formation of pan-Protestant identity. At a protest meeting in Belfast, a Presbyterian minister declared, "Between all forms of Protestantism represented on this platform tonight and Romanism there is a dark gulf fixed." Lee suggests that this statement implied that only the Roman Catholic Church could carry out the kind of actions represented by Ne Temere—specifically, the "dismemberment of a family" and the robbing of a mother of her children. Dr. Murphy, as quoted by Lee, remarked, "The spirit that could break up a happy home… is capable of any enormity." Corkey went further, asserting that "the men that would defend this cruel deed would burn [Protestants] if they had power." According to Lee, "Ne Temere was… the first occasion on which all the Protestant Churches in Ireland took joint and concerted action to preserve their interests. It is likely that the sense of moral superiority which the campaign engendered was also an important element in the forging of a supra-denominational identity among non-Roman Catholics in Ulster" (Lee, 1985). This shared sense of moral outrage and the collective response to Ne Temere not only solidified Protestant unity but also set the stage for the further politicization of Protestant identity in Ulster. As the campaign unfolded, it contributed to the deepening religious and political divisions that would ultimately play a pivotal role in the partition of Ireland.

As Barkley suggests, the infamy surrounding the *Ne Temere* decree and its public connection to the McCann case, especially through speeches, was likely the *key* catalyst for the near-total shift in Presbyterian opposition to Home Rule. At the General Assembly, the vote reflected this change dramatically—"921 against and 43 for," a stark contrast to the situation just two decades earlier. Within the broader Protestant community, the narrative evolved that *Ne Temere* was a glimpse of what would unfold if Ireland were to gain independence and the Catholic Nationalist party took control. The Northern Whig, for example, warned: “The case sheds a flood of light upon what would happen if the Church of Rome were to be established in Ireland, and under Home Rule it would be.” This fueled the widespread belief that Home Rule was merely a steppingstone toward "Rome Rule" (Lee, 1985). In the House of Commons, a Unionist politician further emphasized this idea, stating:

> At least this case of Mrs. McCann is a solemn warning to those of us in Ireland who feared such results [of Nationalist control in Ireland], and I can assure this house that it has strengthened the unalterable determination of Loyalists and Protestants in the country… to retain what they believe to be the only guarantee for the continued enjoyment of their civil rights” (Lee, 1985).

Lee argues that *Ne Temere* became a “powerful cautionary tale” used by Protestant authorities to rally support for the Loyalist cause. As a direct result of *Ne Temere’s* broad implementation and the updating of canon law in Ireland, Protestant-Catholic couples found themselves with no alternative venues to celebrate their marriages. The decree mandated that all marriages involving a Catholic, including mixed marriages, had to be solemnized by a Catholic priest, which had a significant impact on both the couples and their children. While Ne Temere did not specifically address the upbringing of children in mixed marriages, the 1917 Code of Canon Law clearly outlined the Church’s stance, reinforcing its control over family life in Ireland. This further deepened existing divisions and fueled growing resistance to Home Rule among the Protestant population.

However, it is important to note that the prevailing law of the land upheld paternal supremacy, which would have theoretically granted custody to Alexander McCann regardless of the circumstances. Paternal supremacy was a principle in British civil law, rooted in the tradition of male headship of the family, which was dominant in many Western societies, including Britain (which governed Ireland) during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Under paternal supremacy, fathers were considered the natural legal guardians of their children, and in custody disputes, they were typically favored over mothers, regardless of the mother's marital status or any other factors, including religious denomination. Mrs. McCann would not have had a legal path to guardianship under paternal supremacy, a detail overlooked by the public Protestant unrest. This perhaps lends some credence to the argument made by Birrell and explored by Lee, that “the campaign against *Ne Temere* [following *Ne Temere*] was, therefore, merely a maneuver by Unionists to incite opposition to Home Rule.”

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The Decline of Paternal Supremacy

It was long established under British civil law that the father had an “absolute right” to determine the religious background and schooling of his children. This standard, a “relic of old English civil law,” was known as “paternal supremacy.” However, following the revised 1937 Constitution of Ireland and the Tilson case, this centuries-old tradition of paternal supremacy came to an end. For the Roman Catholic Church, however, the ruling was irrelevant, and they continued to uphold their own stance on the religious upbringing of children in mixed marriages (Lee, 1985).

David Jameson, in his article *The Religious Upbringing of Children in ‘Mixed Marriages’: The Evolution of Irish Law*, argues that “mixed marriages have long been a vexed issue in Ireland” and were “frowned upon by both Christian traditions in Ireland.” He notes that disputes and public controversies surrounding mixed marriages have historically focused on the religious upbringing of children, particularly when the Catholic Church and the Irish state held conflicting positions. Under civil law, it had long been established that the father had the sole right to decide the religious upbringing and education of his children. In contrast, Catholic canon law, often in direct opposition to civil law, insisted that all children must be raised as Catholics, regardless of either parent's religious affiliation (Jameson, 2014).

Jameson examines key mixed-marriage cases that came before the Irish courts, highlighting the tensions between civil and canon law. He references the Ussher case and the earlier Beamish case to demonstrate how civil law typically prevailed, even when it conflicted with canon law. Jameson also discusses the Meades and Grey cases, which upheld paternal supremacy before the 1937 Constitution, and the Frost case, which continued to support this principle even after the new Constitution was enacted. Most notably, Jameson focuses on the Tilson case, which "irrevocably changed the civil law position on the religious upbringing of children" and solidified the legally binding nature of Catholic promises (Jameson, 2014).

In 1871, the disestablishment of the Anglican Church of Ireland purportedly gave all religious denominations equal status, as “voluntary non-state bodies.” Mixed marriages in Ireland were considered canonically valid during this period. In 1740, Benedict XIV had exempted mixed marriages from the obligations set forth in *Tametsi*. In 1887, this position was reaffirmed when the Archbishop of Dublin obtained a declaration from the Holy See stating that mixed marriages were valid regardless of the status and uniformity of canonical regulations in different provinces. However, even though mixed marriages were considered valid and legal, the Catholic Church maintained that any resulting children should be baptized and raised as Catholics. To the Irish courts, Catholic regulations were immaterial, and they continued to uphold paternal supremacy (Jameson, 2014).

The Meades case, a significant marriage case of its time, made a public spectacle of the mixed marriage debate. In 1859, Protestant Robert Meade married Catholic Alice Ronayne. Eight years later, Ronayne passed away, and conflict arose regarding the religious upbringing of their children. Until her death, the children had been raised as Catholics. After her passing, Meade began a romance with “a Protestant lady who was animated by a strong religious zeal.” This new relationship influenced his decision to raise the children as Protestants and hire a Protestant governess. Mary Ronayne, the deceased’s sister, also Catholic, took legal action to safeguard the children’s Catholic upbringing and prevent the father from further “interfering with the religion or the religious education of the minors” (Jameson, 2014).

The High Court was informed that, before the marriage, Meade had promised to raise the children as Catholics when required (as outlined by canon law) to do so by the officiating clergyman.” Jameson points out that this promise was “consistent with the fact that the Catholic requirement predated *Ne Temere*.” This case highlights how paternal supremacy limited the Catholic Church’s ability to enforce its prenuptial promises during the era of paternal supremacy in Ireland (Jameson, 2014).

Although paternal supremacy was guaranteed by civil law, the judge also expressed concern for the well-being of the children. While acknowledging the father’s right, he questioned whether a sudden religious change “would be in the best interest of the children.” Upon interviewing the children, the judge discovered that their “Catholic convictions had been shaken” through their exposure to Protestantism, and they “had learnt something of both [religions] but had confident belief in neither.” Ultimately, the judge determined that the children should continue to be raised in the religion of their father, stating, “The authority of the father to guide and govern the education of his child is a very sacred thing, bestowed by the Almighty, and to be sustained to the uttermost by human law.” Although his ruling was rooted in the old British tradition of paternal supremacy, his choice of words invoked religious sentiment and suggested that he did not view the Catholic Church as the sole authority on defining the sacred (Jameson, 2014).

Jameson argues that the Meades case exemplifies how paternal supremacy and broader civil law—regardless of whether the children had been raised as Catholics for their formative years—had ultimate authority over the religious upbringing of children. The ruling emphasized the father's right to determine the children's religious education, provided that their well-being was not compromised. The court also declared that the Catholic promises were non-legally binding, with the judge stating that, although Meade had promised to raise his children in the Catholic tradition, "that engagement was not a binding force in law" (Jameson, 2014). This decision highlights that British civil law superseded Catholic canon law in matters of family life, reaffirming the primacy of state authority over religious agreements.

In 1902, the Grey case reaffirmed the position of paternal supremacy, though the circumstances were "markedly different." Henry Grey and Charlotte Callan, both Protestants, married in 1886 and had six children. In 1900, Henry Grey passed away without leaving a will, leaving his wife unable to financially provide for the girls. She reluctantly sent them to a Protestant orphanage in Harold's Cross, Dublin. In November 1901, Callan met a Catholic man, converted to Catholicism, and remarried. Soon after, she sought to retrieve her girls and raise them as Catholics (Jameson, 2014). The court was tasked with deciding whether Callan had the legal right to change her children's religion and education after becoming their only surviving parent. As Lord Chief Justice O'Brien framed it:

> Can a mother, who had three children with a husband who was a Protestant, and who after his death, whilst she herself was a Protestant, placed them in a Protestant orphanage where they were well cared, now that she had, on a second marriage, become a Catholic, insist on these children, all of whom are of tender years, being restored to her by writ of *habeas corpus*, when the Court to which she applies for that writ is satisfied that she intends to bring them up in a different faith from that in which their father lived and died? That is the question we have to decide (Jameson, 2014).

The most significant detail was the intent to "bring them up in a different faith from that in which their father lived and died." The father's relatives testified that he was a devout Church of Ireland member and would have been outraged by the idea of his children being raised as Catholics. They claimed that had Grey lived to see his wife's efforts to raise their children as Catholics, "he would have endeavored so far as in his power lay, to safeguard his children from any attempt to change their faith." In their favor, the management of the Protestant orphanage where the children had been placed gave evidence that the children were comfortable in their care and did not wish to leave (Jameson, 2014).

The judge described the case as “painful” when delivering his verdict. He acknowledged the “weight of the arguments in support of the mother’s application—[a] mother’s love, the sacredness of the home,… and a mother’s rights as guardian by nature and statute.” However, the judge also noted that Callan had already “committed a breach of marital trust” when she decided to raise her children as Catholics after meeting her second husband (Jameson, 2014).

In his judgment, Lord Chief Justice O’Brien emphasized that the father, Grey, had not “abdicated or forfeited his right to have his children brought up in his religion”—a right outlined under the law of paternal supremacy. He stated, “The law, whose ministers we are, makes no hesitation: it adopts for the children the religion of the father.” As such, the judge ultimately ordered that the children should remain in the orphanage and continue to be raised as Protestants. The judge further defended the value of paternal supremacy, asserting, “Regardless of the merits or demerits of this principle, a court could not stand accused of favouring one faith over another.” In a country where sectarianism was a persistent public issue, appearing impartial was crucial (Jameson, 2014). To this end, Lord Chief Justice O’Brien argued:

> In every country where sectarian divisions exist, it is essential that there should be a settled and intelligible rule as to the religion of the offspring of the wedlock; and that rule, be it in the abstract right or right, is better that there should be some rule than none at all… A lay tribunal does not and cannot distinguish and adjudge between the claims of the various Churches as leaders of divine truth… but it has an objective rule—the male parent’s professed religion—it can decide securely without the appearance of bias (Jameson, 2014).

In the Grey case, as in the prior Meades case, civil law had ultimate authority over canon law, and paternal supremacy remained the law of the land. Even when children had been raised in a religion other than that preferred by their father, as in the Meades case, the courts still affirmed the father's sole right to decide the religious identity and education of the children. Similarly, the promises made to the Catholic Church in the Meades case were deemed non-legally binding.

The same non-legally binding status of the promises applied in the Ussher case, where the guidelines of Tametsi and the newly decreed Ne Temere were irrelevant to the court. In 1910, William Arland Ussher converted from Protestantism to Catholicism with the intention of marrying Mary Caulfield, a Catholic, before Revd Joseph Fahy, the local Catholic parish priest. Ussher later sought a declaration that his marriage was unlawful, arguing that the ceremony had not been performed in accordance with the regulations set forth by the Catholic Church under the Tametsi decree. As Jameson explains, the case was brought "on the basis of an irregularity of canonical form." After the wedding, William and Mary Ussher cohabited, and a year later, Mary gave birth to a baby girl. Ussher's counsel argued that if the marriage were deemed null and void, the child would be "bastardized" and the mother "degraded" (Jameson, 2014).

The court was informed that Ussher had sought a clandestine marriage because he was aware that his upcoming inheritance from his father's estate could be jeopardized by his conversion to Catholicism and marriage to a Catholic. When he initially suggested the idea of a clandestine marriage to Father Fahy, Fahy strongly encouraged him to acquire the required two witnesses for the ceremony, as outlined in the *Tametsi* and *Ne Temere* decrees (Jameson, 2014). However, it seems that the priest eventually acquiesced to Ussher's demands. On the night of Sunday, 24 April 1910, Father Fahy secretly visited Ussher's home, where he was led to an unused upstairs bedroom to perform "the ceremony of receiving the petitioner [Ussher] into the Catholic Church." Shortly thereafter, Ussher gathered his bride, Mary Caulfield, and a household cook, Agnes Kavanagh, who agreed to act as a witness for the ceremony. The three were then moved to another room where Father Fahy performed the marriage "in accordance with the rituals of the Catholic Church, but in the presence of only one witness." Ussher's case was argued on the grounds that "there were no statutory provisions regulating the religious ceremony between Roman Catholics; the test of legal validity was its celebration in accordance with the law for the time being of the Roman Catholic Church." Ussher's defense contended that civil law concerning marriage had been written by and for Protestants. For Catholics, they argued, the validity of marriage was determined by canon law (Jameson, 2014). This interpretation that Catholic canon law superseded civil law was countered by Mary Caulfield's counsel, who argued that the decrees of the Catholic Church should hold no weight in civil court. They asserted:

> The law by which the validity of the alleged marriage is to be tested is not the marriage law of the Roman Catholic Church, but the Common Law of England and Ireland as same existed and was administered down to the time of the Reformation. That, so far as the marriages of Roman Catholics are concerned, their legality continues to be governed by the same law as before the Reformation (Jameson, 2014).

With no statute law governing Catholic marriages, Caulfield’s defense argued that the marriage, despite lacking one of the canonically required witnesses, was still valid under civil law. Interestingly, Mary Caulfield, raised Catholic, advocated for civil law, while William Arland Ussher, raised Protestant, supported canon law. Both individuals were primarily focused on asserting their own rights in the marriage rather than upholding the authority of the religious community to which they were affiliated (Jameson, 2014).

The judge considered several factors in making his decision. He had to determine whether the absence of a required witness invalidated the marriage according to Catholic law, and whether Ussher’s claim that the validity of his marriage depended on it “being a Catholic marriage in the strict theological sense” had legal standing. Additionally, the judge needed to decide whether Ussher’s admission of being a Protestant within twelve months prior to the marriage rendered it invalid, based on British law, which declared a marriage officiated by a ‘Popish priest’ for a ‘Papist’ or a person who had identified as Protestant within twelve months prior, to be null and void (Jameson, 2014).

To resolve these dilemmas, the judge heavily relied on a precedent from an earlier case, Beamish v. Beamish (1861), in County Cork. In that case, the Revd. Samuel Beamish had performed his own marriage to Isabella Beamish without a witness, other than a servant girl who happened to pass by a window and witnessed the ceremony. In Beamish v. Beamish, the court ruled that while the marriage was irregular, it was still valid. According to common and civil law, witnesses were necessary for proof, but not for the actual validity of the marriage. Despite the mandates of the *Tametsi* and *Ne Temere* decrees, the judge determined that the lack of a witness did not invalidate the marriage in this case. He argued, "There is not a suggestion that in pre-Reformation times either in Common law or Church Law a witness to marriage was essential to its validity." The judge clarified that although the Reformation had altered the structure of the National Church, common law still governed marriage, and therefore Catholic decrees did not affect its validity. Even though *Ne Temere*, issued only three years earlier, also required three witnesses, it was found to hold no authority over common law. The court of appeal was later informed that according to *Canon 8* of the *Ne Temere* decree, if an authorized priest could not be present, a marriage could still be valid if the parties declared their consent in the presence of two witnesses, without the need for a priest (Jameson, 2014). This demonstrated the court's adherence to civil law over ecclesiastical decrees, affirming that common law took precedence in matters of marriage validity.

Ussher's claim that the conditional nature of his marriage's validity was based on the phrase he and Caulfield repeated during the ceremony, "if the Holy Church will it permit," was dismissed by the judge. He stated that if Ussher desired a "perfect ecclesiastical marriage," the failure to achieve this was his own fault. The judge noted that it was solely Ussher's actions that had invalidated the marriage in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Ussher had been informed before the ceremony of the number of witnesses required, and he chose to provide only one. Furthermore, Ussher's argument that his conversion to Catholicism had occurred within the 12-month period prior to the marriage was rejected. The judge clarified that the Act establishing this condition, which Ussher cited, was from the seventeenth-century Penal Laws and had been repealed in 1870 (Jameson, 2014).

Ultimately, the judge ruled in favor of Mary Caulfield, declaring the marriage to be "a valid legal marriage" and affirming that the *Tametsi* and *Ne Temere* decrees had no legal authority in civil law. To the court, the marriage was legitimate as two people had consensually entered into a marriage contract before a priest, which was sufficient for legal recognition. Jameson considers these rulings, which prioritized civil law, to be significant, especially when compared to later cases involving the religious upbringing of children in mixed marriages and the promises required by the Catholic Church before the 1937 Constitution of the Irish Free State.

The subsequent Frost and Tilson cases, Jameson argues, serve as key points of comparison to illustrate the shift that occurred after the revised 1937 Constitution. According to Jameson, interdenominational marriages were dramatically affected by the 1937 Constitution. Prior to this revision, courts consistently upheld paternal supremacy in determining the religious upbringing of children. However, with the Tilson judgment of 1950, which referenced Article 42.1 of the Constitution, the state began to legally back the signed prenuptial agreement, or "the promises," made by the Catholic Church regarding the religious upbringing of children in mixed marriages (Jameson, 2014).

Interpretations of the Tilson outcome have varied. Many historians, along with numerous southern Protestants, viewed the judgment—and, by extension, the 1937 Constitution—as evidence that the newly independent Irish state was inherently Catholic in both its stance and mindset. Mary Elliot, as noted by Jameson, saw the Tilson case as a reminder, if Protestants needed one, of how Catholic values permeated Irish public life. Patrick Corish argued that the 1937 Constitution was rooted in Catholic morality, which had solidified into Catholic social thought and teaching. David Fitzpatrick, also cited by Jameson, claimed that much of de Valera’s new constitution had been drafted by Jesuits and other clerical advisors. However, the extent to which Catholicism influenced the new Constitution remains a topic of ongoing speculation and debate (Jameson, 2014).

Jameson does not accept the view that the 1937 Constitution was solely shaped by Catholicism. He references a 2005 article by Gerald Hogan in *The Irish Jurist*, which argues that the Constitution may not have been as influenced by Catholic teachings as some historians suggest. While Hogan acknowledges that Catholic doctrine influenced the revised Constitution, he disagrees with the claims of historians like R.F. Foster, who argues that five constitutional articles concerning "rights" were significantly influenced by papal encyclicals and Catholic social teachings. Hogan critiques Foster's argument by highlighting that Foster overlooks the value of the rights protected by the Constitution itself, separate from their philosophical sources (Jameson, 2014).

Concerning the "special position" of the Catholic Church, referenced in Article 44 of the 1937 Constitution (later removed in 1972), Hogan argues that this is not unique to Ireland. He cites other European countries, such as Poland, Spain, Greece, and Norway, which also include references to the Catholic Church or a state religion in their constitutions. While Hogan and Jameson justify this practice based on its commonality in Europe, they acknowledge that such provisions have been criticized. In all these countries, including Ireland, ethnoreligious nationalism is embedded in the legal frameworks (Jameson, 2014).

Hogan also highlights the lack of detailed legal commentary on the drafting of the Constitution, which has hindered a fair historical analysis of the document. He notes that the work of constitutional experts like Josh Hearne, legal adviser to the Department of External Affairs, and Maurice Moynihan, secretary to the government, have not received sufficient attention. Jameson concurs, pointing out that the 1937 Constitution is often discussed without fully considering how nation-states view themselves and how constitutions shape national self-images. Despite this, the Constitution still contains ethnoreligious language. Regardless of these concerns, the Constitution’s significance in the Tilson case remains undeniable (Jameson, 2014).

The projection of these issues was not straightforward. In 1945, eight years after the revised 1937 Constitution, the Frost case upheld paternal supremacy over Catholic prenuptial agreements. Jameson argues that the Frost judgment gave Protestants a false sense of security regarding mixed marriages. Without any change in the legal status of such marriages, Protestants believed civil law still took precedence over canon law. As a result, they were largely unconcerned about the 1937 Constitution, despite its recognition of the Catholic Church’s special position in Ireland (Jameson, 2014).

In 1930, Charles Frost, a Protestant, married Margaret Frost, a Catholic, in a Catholic ceremony in Dublin. As required for a mixed marriage dispensation, Charles signed a document affirming that their children would be baptized and raised Catholic, with a Catholic education. The couple had six children, but their marriage became strained due to Charles Frost's insistence on raising the children as Protestants. Margaret reluctantly agreed to her husband's wishes. After ten years of marriage, the couple separated in 1940. The separation agreement granted Margaret custody of their three youngest children, while the three eldest were placed in a Protestant children's home, "The Bird’s Nest," in Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin. Margaret claimed this decision was made without her consent. Facing financial hardship, she later entrusted her three youngest children to Charles, who placed them with their older siblings at the home (Jameson, 2014).

A year later, Charles Frost died. Following his death, Margaret Frost sought to recover her children and raise them as Catholics through an order for *habeas corpus* from the High Court. In Charles Frost’s will, he had stipulated that his children should continue to be raised in the Church of Ireland tradition. The court had to determine whether, after his passing, Margaret had the right to raise their children as Catholics. The High Court ruled that the two youngest children were unlikely to have fixed religious views and should therefore be returned to their mother’s care. However, the court recognized the father’s rights and ordered that the eldest children remain in the Protestant home, continuing their Protestant upbringing and education. Judge Cahir Davitt, in addressing the issue of the Catholic promises, stated that “Frost had given the undertaking required, observed it for a period, and then refused to abide by it.” Though he acknowledged that Frost had signed the prenuptial promises, Davitt declared that these promises were not legally binding. He instead based his judgment on "the absolute right of the father." The High Court ruled that the eldest children should be raised in the religion of their deceased father, as specified in his will (Jameson, 2014).

Margaret Frost sought to overturn Davitt's judgment by appealing to the Supreme Court. Her counsel invoked Articles 41.1 and 42.1 of the Constitution. Article 41.1 declares, "The state recognizes the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society," and Article 42.1 states, "The State acknowledges the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family." Her counsel argued that the term "family" includes both parents and children as a unit and that, as such, decisions regarding the children's education and religious upbringing should be a mutual parental decision. If the Constitution supported this view, the decision about the religious upbringing of the children would not solely rest with the father (Jameson, 2014).

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Mr. Justice C.J. Sullivan, was not persuaded by this argument. Like Judge Davitt, he understood Margaret Frost's distress over her husband's decision to break the commitment he made before their marriage, but he concluded that it did not affect his legal right to decide the children's religion. Sullivan emphasized that the long-established legal rule in the country is that the father has the right to determine the children's religious education once he has exercised this right. The court upheld this principle in the *Frost* case, affirming that British common law, which granted the father sole authority over the children's religious upbringing, remained valid in Ireland. The court also asserted that paternal supremacy was not unconstitutional, regardless of Articles 41.1 and 42.1 of the Constitution (Jameson, 2014).

Regarding the Catholic promises, the court ruled that both parents had agreed to raise the children as Protestants, despite the mother's reluctance. It also found that both parents had violated their commitment to the Catholic Church to raise the children as Catholics. The Supreme Court extended the High Court's decision, ruling that the children, including the youngest, should remain in their Protestant upbringing at "Mrs. Smyly's Homes." As a result, Margaret Frost lost more of her children after appealing to the Supreme Court. Jameson points out that in 1945, a mother whose husband had died was denied the right to raise her children, based on a law from Britain's past. The court's decision also stirred strong resentment among Catholics, as it disregarded the promises made to the Catholic Church (Jameson, 2014).

In the Frost case, the Supreme Court's ruling reinforced that the 1937 Constitution did not undermine paternal supremacy in Irish civil law. This decision reassured Protestants that their rights were not threatened by the Constitution. However, the comfort provided by the Frost case was short-lived. Five years later, in the Tilson case, both the High Court and the Supreme Court ruled that prenuptial promises were legally binding. This decision sparked widespread anxiety and backlash within Protestant communities. An editorial in *The Irish Times* highlighted that the judgment raised significant concerns. The principle of paternal supremacy, which had appeared to maintain a plausible neutrality, seemed to lose its standing with this ruling (Jameson, 2014).

In 1941, Protestant Ernest Tilson married Catholic Mary Barnes in a Catholic ceremony in Dublin, with Barnes already pregnant. Affidavits suggested that both were eager to marry. Although Tilson applied for a dispensation to marry a Catholic, his request was initially denied. He then took the unusual step of meeting with a parish priest and giving assurances that he would do everything in his power to raise the children as Catholics. To guarantee this commitment, Tilson wrote and signed a Catholic prenuptial agreement, promising to baptize and educate their children in the Catholic faith. With this assurance, the dispensation was granted, and the wedding took place on December 10, 1941 (Jameson, 2014).

Jameson cites an example of prenuptial promises from 1966 in the Archdiocese of Dublin. The Catholic partner promises that all children born of the marriage will be baptized and raised in the Catholic faith, while the Protestant partner agrees not to impede the Catholic partner in fulfilling this obligation. Both parties must sign the document in the presence of two witnesses, one of whom must be a priest, who will also sign and provide their profession (Jameson, 2014).

The Tilson couple had four sons, all of whom were baptized and raised as Catholics. However, the marriage became troubled, and affidavits from both parties were presented as the case eventually reached the High Court. Amid the marital breakdown, Tilson decided to place the three eldest children in a Protestant home, the "Bird's Nest." This led his wife to seek a habeas corpus order to regain custody of the children. Tilson's decision to raise the children as Protestants violated the prenuptial agreement he had signed. Jameson emphasizes that it was this agreement, freely made by Tilson, which became a key factor in the court's decision (Jameson, 2014).

The Tilson case brought church and state into direct conflict, as the court had to decide whether the longstanding civil view of paternal supremacy, reaffirmed in the *Frost* case, conflicted with the Catholic prenuptial agreements. The court faced uncertainty over whether paternal supremacy conflicted with Article 42.1 of the 1937 Constitution and whether the Catholic promises were legally binding (Jameson, 2014).

Justice Gavan Duffy, President of the High Court, referred to Articles 41, 42, and 44 of the Constitution. Article 42.1, which states that "The natural educator of the child is the family," was particularly significant in his judgment. Duffy argued that the prenuptial agreement Tilson had signed was consistent with the Constitution's spirit, protecting marriage, family harmony, and the child's right to religious education. He stated that these agreements "crystallized" the child's rights under the Constitution. Duffy also criticized paternal supremacy as an outdated concept, unfit for a legal system shaped by Ireland's Constitution. His ruling, which some saw as having Catholic undertones, remains controversial, with Jameson noting that the decision has been misinterpreted by some historians (Jameson, 2014).

Protestants were further troubled by Duffy's reference to canon law, where he suggested that "the relevant Canons were part of the old Canon law and possibly the constitutional recognition of the special position of the Catholic Church would authorize the Courts to take judicial notice of Canon Law." Though Duffy ventured into this area, Jameson notes that he stopped short of fully endorsing it, with some scholars, such as Jeans Blanchard, suggesting that Duffy "mercifully did not quite take that step." Jameson argues that the moral panic surrounding the *Tilson* case influenced how the ruling is interpreted by historians today.

In his appeal to the Supreme Court, Tilson contested Duffy's judgment. Marianne Elliot, in her analysis, focused exclusively on Duffy's ruling, neglecting the subsequent Supreme Court decision. Elliot highlighted the Catholic elements in Duffy's judgment, such as his approval of Tilson's decision to marry Barnes after she became pregnant and his discouragement of mixed marriages. Elliot claimed Duffy ruled in favor of the Catholic mother, citing the special position of the Catholic Church in the Constitution, which she interpreted as requiring judicial recognition of canon law. Jameson disagrees with this interpretation, pointing out that Duffy never fully addressed these questions without further debate, and Elliot ignored the pivotal Supreme Court ruling. While Elliot may have been overly definitive in her analysis of Duffy's alignment with the Catholic Church, Jameson's more lenient interpretation also merits scrutiny (Jameson, 2014). John Cooney wrote a biography of John Charles McQuaid, the Archbishop of Dublin, in which he suggested that McQuaid had communicated directly with Justice Gavan Duffy regarding the *Tilson* case. Cooney refers to a letter from Joe Walshe to McQuaid in which Walshe expresses relief at Duffy's decision, highlighting the positive outcome that resulted from Duffy's "patient and consistent work" (Jameson, 2014). Jameson, while not fully agreeing with Elliot, acknowledges Duffy's clear "Catholic bias" in his interpretation of the 1937 Constitution. Jameson cites Duffy's statement that the Constitution deliberately establishes a Christian framework, rejecting religious indifferentism, and affirms the Catholic Church's right to safeguard the faith of its majority adherents (Jameson, 2014).

However, Jameson points out that while Duffy's judgment carried significant weight, the ultimate decision rested with the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld the High Court's ruling but distanced itself from Duffy's overt Catholic references. The Court did, however, affirm that Catholic prenuptial agreements were legally binding. This decision was grounded in the idea that both parents, as a family unit, shared the duty and power regarding the religious education of their children, which diminished the role of paternal supremacy in Irish law. Citing Article 42.1, the Supreme Court ruled that the family, rather than the father alone, should decide the children's religious upbringing. It also upheld the enforceability of the Catholic prenuptial agreement signed by Tilson, despite the fact that only Catholicism had formalized such a contract for mixed marriages (Jameson, 2014).

The Tilson case marked the end of paternal supremacy in Ireland. Chief Justice George Murnaghan declared that paternal supremacy, rooted in English law, was outdated and irrelevant to a modern Irish state. Nevertheless, the decision was not without opposition. Justice Black, the sole Protestant member of the Supreme Court, dissented, raising the question of whether the court would have ruled similarly if the mixed marriage promises had favored the Protestant party. This question, however, remains unanswerable because only Catholicism had a formalized mixed marriage contract (Jameson, 2014).

The Tilson ruling generated significant Protestant outrage. Many Protestants feared that the judgment was based on the "special position of the Catholic Church" under Article

44.1, rather than the family-based framework of Article 42.1. This fueled concerns that the Catholic Church had undue influence over the 1937 Constitution and the governance of the Irish Free State. The *Irish Times* editorial suggested that Irish jurisprudence was increasingly influenced by Catholic principles. Jameson, however, argues that the Constitution clearly states that the family—not the father alone—should decide the religious upbringing of children, regardless of the Catholic Church's influence (Jameson, 2014).

Jameson does not critique the legal recognition of Catholic prenuptial promises but cites Hogan, who suggests that if the State did not give legal effect to such promises, it would constitute an unconstitutional interference with religious freedom as guaranteed by Article 44.2.1. He also references the New York civil case *Ramon v. Ramon*, where Catholic promises were similarly given civil authority based on the principle of religious freedom (Jameson, 2014).

The *Tilson* case's outcome was reaffirmed in the 1957 *May* case, where the President of the High Court, citing Justice Murnaghan's interpretation of Article 42.1, emphasized the "joint power and duty" of both parents in determining their children's religious upbringing, continuing the precedent set by the *Tilson* decision. Jameson concludes that the *Tilson* ruling brought an end to paternal supremacy in Ireland, a conclusion also supported in the *May* case. He acknowledges valid criticism of paternal supremacy for causing numerous injustices, as well as of the Catholic Church's policy requiring all children from mixed marriages to be raised Catholic. Jameson also raises a challenging question for the Catholic Church regarding its stance on family sanctity—how many families were torn apart as a result of the Church's policy, which contributed to the disruption of many homes and left children in difficult situations to maintain religious distinctions (Jameson, 2014).

Fethard-on-Sea Boycott

De Bhaldraithe, in his review of Tim Fanning's *The Fethard-on-Sea Boycott*, summarizes the events surrounding one of the most infamous mixed marriage cases in Ireland. In 1949, Sean Cloney, a Catholic, and Sheila Kelly, a member of the Church of Ireland, married in a London registry office. Both were from the village of Fethard-on-Sea in South Wexford, where strong pressure existed to have a formal church wedding. They were later married in an Augustinian Church, under the condition that their children would be raised Catholic. However, Sheila, attached to her own traditions, insisted on a blessing in an Anglican church as well. After the wedding, they returned to Dungulph Castle and had two daughters. Sheila was determined to raise them with both Catholic and Protestant customs. Despite her wishes, the children were baptized Catholic and enrolled in a Catholic school due to immense pressure. Sheila, feeling powerless, moved to Belfast in 1957 with her children. The Catholic clergy believed that local Protestants financially supported her, leading them to initiate a boycott of Protestant businesses. This had serious economic consequences for Protestants, a minority in the region. The boycott received significant media attention in Northern Ireland, fueling Protestant fears about mixed marriages and childrearing. The Taoiseach, Eamonn de Valera, was embarrassed by the situation and sought to prevent Archbishop McQuaid from making public comments on the case, leading McQuaid to remain publicly neutral. Bishop Staunton of Ferns, a staunch supporter of the boycott, found McQuaid's neutrality embarrassing, although Fanning credits Staunton as the primary instigator of the boycott. To end the boycott, Minister of Justice Jim Ryan negotiated a secret deal, leading Sheila to return to Fethard-on-Sea under the condition that the children would not attend Catholic or Protestant schools but would be homeschooled. This case became infamous and was later portrayed in the film *A Love Divided* (Fanning, 2001).

Fanning is openly critical of what he terms "historic Roman Catholic moral tyranny." De Bhaldraithe, a Cistercian priest known for his bold theological views, echoes this sentiment, reflecting on the futility of dividing communities along religious lines. He attributes the roots of such divisions to *Ne Temere*, a decree that required children from mixed marriages to be raised Catholic. De Bhaldraithe questions whether the original error was *Ne Temere* itself or the broader historical division between Catholicism and Protestantism, which has had devastating consequences for Europe and Ireland. He acknowledges his deep expertise in ecumenical matters, and while he is supportive of mixed marriage debates, he too links *Ne Temere* with the forced promises in mixed marriages due to the delayed enforcement of such decrees in Ireland (De Bhaldraithe, 1988).

Historically, the Irish churches functioned as powerful ethnoreligious agents, helping to define community membership, land ownership, and the religious identity of children. The legacy of Ireland’s caste system, shaped by penal laws and ecclesiastical mandates, created lasting tensions over land ownership and inheritance. Though gendered inheritance structures appeared neutral, mixed marriages, particularly those involving a Catholic wife and Protestant husband, were rarely as neutral as they seemed. As explored later in the section on modernity and gendered religious inheritance, over 70% of mixed marriages involved this Catholic-Protestant dynamic. Joseph McRory, Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor in 1919, argued that mixed marriages were beneficial for the Church since, in most cases, the Catholic wife ensured the children were raised Catholic. In contrast, Martin McGuire of Dromore Diocese lamented that in Protestant areas, mixed marriages often led to losses for the Church (McRory, 1919; McGuire, 1920).

The *Ne Temere* decree, focused on the validity of mixed marriages, had long-lasting consequences, requiring couples to make promises regarding the religious upbringing of their children. While often misattributed to *Ne Temere*, its full impact on mixed marriages in Ireland became apparent during its enforcement. The state's shifting relationship with the Protestant Ascendancy and later, Catholic authority, has had a profound influence on religious and cultural dynamics. Protestant concerns about “Home Rule is Rome Rule” were not without merit, especially given the power granted to canon law in Ireland, as evidenced in the *Tilson* Case. Before these shifts, Catholics had lived under a minority rule for centuries, marked by an ethnoreligious caste system that left its scars (Lee, 1985).

Jack White, in *Minority Report: The Protestant Community in the Irish Republic*, cites Bishop William Philbin's 1957 remarks, which express concerns about the growing influence of the Protestant minority in Irish public life. Philbin argued that Protestant leaders sought to regain dominance, invoking their past ascendancy, and emphasized that this could challenge the Catholic nature of the nation. Both communities, aware of their historical grievances, feared the other side gaining political and state control (White, 1985).

The issue of civil divorce in 1986 reignited old tensions between Catholics and Protestants. The Catholic bishops, adhering to the Vatican's global stance against civil divorce, drew parallels between Ireland's situation and other Catholic countries like Italy and Spain. De Bhaldraithe argues that the Vatican’s consistent opposition to civil divorce reflects its influence on local bishops, even as it overlooked the unique sectarian challenges in Ireland. He notes that in England, most Protestant clergy were unfamiliar with the *Ne Temere* decree, while in Ireland, it remains a highly charged and controversial issue tied to mixed marriage and the religious upbringing of children (De Bhaldraithe, 1988).

McCaughey critiques the churches' historical role in perpetuating divisions, arguing that their continued influence fails to heal the rift between the communities. Rather than offering true moral leadership, he believes the churches have become spokespersons for their respective communities' anxieties. Political leaders, recognizing the religious dimension of the Northern Ireland conflict, sought the churches' support, further entrenching their role in perpetuating division. According to McCaughey, for a true resolution of the mixed marriage issue, the churches must adopt a "prophetic" role, offering leadership that transcends sectarian divisions. However, he remains doubtful that the churches can play such a role without further compromising their position. While these entrenched divisions and anxieties reflect the deep historical and social context in which they have developed, there remains potential for change. The very same power structures that once perpetuated these barriers can also be challenged, as evolving social, political, and religious movements continue to reshape the possibilities for unity and reconciliation.

Ecumenicism

Towards the onset of the Troubles, churches began to reflect more critically on their role in fueling the conflict and in creating the ethnoreligious divisions that had come to define much of Irish society. Anglican-Roman Catholic conciliation efforts had already begun two years before the Second Vatican Council in 1962, when Pope John XXIII established the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity (now the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, or PCPCU). That same year, he invited Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher of Canterbury to the Vatican for a private visit, setting a precedent for the upcoming council. At the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), theological experts from Orthodox, Anglican, and non-Anglican Protestant churches played a significant advisory role, helping shape the discussions (Comerford, 2012).

In the wake of the Council, the Catholic Church adapted its canon law, incorporating its ecumenical teachings into the decree on Ecumenism and the Declaration on Religious Liberty (Morgan et al., 1996). This spirit of reform extended to a new decree on mixed marriages, *Matrimonia Mixta*, which emerged after the Second Vatican Council.

In the years following the Council, Michael Hurley, the founder of the Irish School of Ecumenics, published a collection of essays that would become a significant milestone in ecumenical thought. Patrick Comerford, in his article “An Irish Anglican Response to Vatican II,” describes Hurley's work as "a ground-breaking exercise in ecumenism." Hurley gathered Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, and Catholic scholars, asking them to reflect critically yet positively on the role of the Anglican Church in Irish life over the past century (Comerford, 2012).

These evolving efforts toward ecumenical understanding, though initially rooted in historical divisions, reveal that such barriers can be overcome as long as the socio-political and religious contexts are acknowledged and re-examined. By fostering dialogue and challenging old paradigms, new paths to reconciliation and unity can be forged.

Matrimonia Mixta

In April 1970, Pope Paul VI issued the motu proprio *Matrimonia Mixta* (Latin for "mixed marriage"), revising the regulations surrounding mixed marriages. As Brian Lennon explains in his article "Interchurch Marriages: Torn Between Divided Churches," the document sought to update canon law considering the new ecclesiological understanding introduced by Vatican II (Lennon, 1980). *Matrimonia Mixta* offered a more flexible and inclusive approach compared to previous Catholic regulations. Under this revision, only the Catholic partner is required to promise to raise the children in the Catholic faith, whereas earlier rulings demanded this commitment from both partners (Reaves, 2008).

The *motu proprio* still requires a dispensation for a mixed marriage to be valid under canon law. Additionally, if the marriage is conducted by a non-Roman Catholic minister, a further dispensation from canonical form is necessary for the marriage to be considered valid. However, the document stresses that canonical regulations should not be excessively rigid, particularly regarding the form of the marriage, its liturgical celebration, and the pastoral care of the couple and children. Instead, the pastoral approach should be flexible, taking into account the specific situations of each couple and their varying degrees of ecclesiastical communion (Lennon, 1980).

A year after the release of *Matrimonia Mixta*, national authorities convened to establish guidelines for its implementation. In October 1970, the Irish Bishops gathered in Maynooth and issued their own set of guidelines. These guidelines have received both criticism and justification. Some argue that the Irish Bishops missed an opportunity to fully embrace the flexibility offered by *Matrimonia Mixta*, thus failing to promote unity between the Churches in Ireland. Conversely, defenders contend that the Irish Bishops were constrained by the papal decree's requirements and could not have gone further (Deane, 1974).

In response to *Matrimonia Mixta*, the Irish Catholic hierarchy issued a statement in their *Directory on Ecumenism*. They argued that the issue of mixed marriages could only be resolved with full Church unity. However, the statement did not express a willingness to compromise further. The Irish Bishops maintained that the Catholic partner must do everything in their power to ensure the children are baptized and raised in the Roman Catholic Church, seeing this as a matter not just of canon law but also of divine law. Without a dispensation from canonical form, a mixed marriage would be considered invalid (Lennon, 1980).

To clarify these issues further, Declan Deane, in his article "Mixed Marriage: Irish and Swiss Bishops' Statements Compared," examines the Swiss Bishops' response to the papal decree. Deane notes that while the Swiss Bishops' approach was aligned with that of other European Bishops' Conferences, it also offers important insights into the Irish context, especially considering both countries' histories of Catholic-Protestant tensions and the significant Catholic and Protestant populations in each (Deane, 1974).

The Swiss Bishops' guidelines took notable steps toward reconciliation, while the Irish Bishops' approach appeared less ecumenically sensitive. The Swiss Bishops shared their draft guidelines with representatives of the Reformed Churches of Switzerland before finalizing them, incorporating feedback into the final version. In contrast, the Irish Bishops did not engage similarly with the Reformed Churches of Ireland (Deane, 1974).

The Swiss Bishops emphasized several key principles in their guidelines, offering a broader rationale for the new legislation and encouraging both Catholic and non-Catholic partners to deepen their mutual understanding. The first principle highlights the influence of the ecumenical movement on the Catholic Church's perspective on mixed marriages. This shift in outlook led the Church to reassess its approach to pastoral care for such unions. For the Swiss Bishops, *Matrimonia Mixta* fosters greater openness between partners and reflects the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, as well as the goals of the 1967 Bishops' Synod. It seeks to deepen understanding between Catholic and non-Catholic partners while also enhancing their shared responsibility (Deane, 1974).

The second principle asserts that marriage is a natural right, and individuals have the freedom to choose their marriage partners in accordance with their conscience, while also respecting their responsibility to the community. The statement underscores that both partners share the duty to educate their children, and both their convictions and freedom of conscience must be respected (Deane, 1974).

The third principle addresses the challenges of mixed marriages. Although churches share a common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through baptism, they acknowledge differences in their understanding of revelation. The Swiss Bishops conclude that these differences must be respected, as failing to do so would undermine faithfulness to God’s word. As a result, while churches generally prefer marriages within the same denomination, they recognize that mixed marriages can contribute to the restoration of Christian unity (Deane, 1974).

In contrast, the Irish Bishops' statement lacks similar principles to justify the new legislation. However, the final paragraph of their statement offers a hint of ecumenical promise, if further developed. It asserts that "the Church’s position on this delicate question is dictated by fidelity to the Catholic truth, charity towards the people involved, and an eager desire for the day when our Lord’s prayer will be fulfilled: ‘that they may be one.’ For only then can the difficult questions involved in mixed marriage be resolved" (Deane, 1974).

While the Swiss Bishops acknowledge that mixed marriages can contribute to Christian unity, they still prefer marriages between individuals of the same denomination. In contrast, the Irish statement does not address this potential contribution to unity. Instead, it envisions a future point of doctrinal unity (Deane, 1974).

The Swiss guidelines also emphasize the importance of the Catholic partner respecting the faith of the non-Catholic partner. The Catholic partner is expected to promise to raise the children in the Catholic faith while respecting the non-Catholic partner’s right to practice their own religion. The Catholic partner must act according to their conscience, which includes respecting their spouse’s beliefs. In contrast, the Irish statement does not mention the need for respecting the non-Catholic partner's faith (Deane, 1974).

As previously mentioned, the Swiss Bishops assert that the Catholic partner in a mixed marriage should promise, after discussion with the non-Catholic partner, to raise the children in the Catholic faith. The Catholic partner is expected to ensure the children are baptized and raised in the Catholic faith, while also considering the non-Catholic partner's beliefs. This promise should not harm the marriage, and the Catholic partner must act in good faith, acknowledging the spouse's convictions. Although certain circumstances may make it impossible to fully meet this obligation, the Catholic partner should still make a reasonable effort. In contrast, the Irish statement places this responsibility solely on the Catholic partner, without recognizing shared responsibility or offering flexibility (Deane, 1974).

Regarding the dispensation from canonical form, the Swiss Bishops emphasize the religious significance of marriage, stating, "We rejoice when a church celebration takes place," highlighting the spiritual nature of Christian marriage. In contrast, the Irish Bishops simply state that it is their duty to emphasize that a Catholic marriage outside the presence of a priest and two witnesses is "null and void" unless the bishop's authorization is obtained, without offering any positive or ecumenical dimension (Deane, 1974).

The Swiss guidelines go further by allowing a non-Catholic pastor to participate in a wedding ceremony in a Catholic church—something the Irish statement does not address. Similarly, the Swiss document permits a Catholic priest to participate in a wedding ceremony in a Protestant church, which is not mentioned in the Irish statement. The Swiss Bishops also stress the importance of joint pastoral care for couples before and after the wedding, promoting family unity and ecumenical dialogue—an aspect that is absent from the Irish statement. Additionally, the Swiss Bishops encourage couples whose marriages were previously deemed invalid to seek retroactive recognition, known as *sanatio in radice*. The Irish Bishops make no mention of this provision (Deane, 1974).

The Swiss Bishops used the publication of *Matrimonia Mixta* as an opportunity to extend a gesture of reconciliation to other Swiss Churches. In contrast, the Irish Bishops missed a similar opportunity for reconciliation. Deane argues that had the Irish Bishops' 1970 statement been expanded, the Swiss guidelines could have provided a helpful framework for a more comprehensive and ecumenically sensitive approach (Deane, 1974). This comparison highlights the Swiss Bishops' proactive stance in fostering unity, which was noticeably absent in the Irish response.

John Cooney, an Irish Catholic journalist who documented the social and sectarian tensions of the time, critiqued the Irish Bishops' failure to adequately address the issue of mixed marriages in 1974. In his *Dublin Letter: Mixed Marriage*, Cooney expresses frustration with the Irish Bishops for not taking a more active role in fostering reconciliation amid the ongoing conflict. While the Bishops have expressed a desire for reconciliation, Cooney argues they missed a critical opportunity for goodwill. He also criticizes their inadequate response to the broader social and political implications of mixed marriages in a way that could have promoted deeper reconciliation (Cooney, 1974; Deane, 1974).

Cooney's *Dublin Letter: Mixed Marriage* (1974), written during the Troubles, critiques the Catholic Church's stance on mixed marriages, interfaith relationships, and broader social and sectarian conflicts. Cooney explores how the issue of mixed marriages between Catholics and Protestants is deeply intertwined with sectarian tensions and the political role of religious institutions. He recounts the Irish School of Ecumenics' International Consultation on Mixed Marriage, held in Dublin, which addressed the Catholic Church's role in exacerbating divisions between Protestants and Catholics, particularly in the Republic of Ireland (Cooney, 1974).

Cooney references Dr. Garret Fitzgerald, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who fully supported the Consultation's conclusions. Fitzgerald argued that the Church's strict stance on mixed marriages had contributed to the decline of the Protestant population in the Republic, which, in turn, heightened fears among Northern Protestants and exacerbated sectarian conflict. He asserted, "The law on mixed marriage in the Republic... has so intensified Northern Protestants' fears that today the very existence of the Catholic population in parts of the North was threatened" (Cooney, 1974). This statement highlights how Protestant fears of a united Ireland—fueled by the perceived weakening of Protestant influence—were key factors in the growing sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

According to Cooney, the Consultation participants widely agreed that the main issue with mixed marriages in Ireland was the Irish Bishops' overly strict application of Roman Catholic Church legislation, which was considered more restrictive than in other regions. The

Consultation notably included Church of Ireland representation, with figures such as Primate Dr. Siún, Archbishop of Dublin Dr. Buchanan, and Bishop of Limerick Dr. Caird attending all sessions. However, the absence of any Roman Catholic authority—especially the Irish Hierarchy from both the Republic and Northern Ireland—was striking. This absence revealed a reluctance to engage in broader discussions, particularly since the Consultation addressed key issues impacting interchurch relations (Cooney, 1974).

Had Catholic leaders been present, Cooney asserts, they could have gained a deeper understanding of the wider concerns discussed. He references Catholic theologian Fr. Gabriel Daly who suggested that the Irish situation was unique enough to warrant a reconsideration of the Church's stance, proposing that a proposal from Irish church leaders could be sympathetically received in Rome. However, whether this suggestion would be acted upon depended on whether the Irish Bishops were willing to acknowledge the evidence and adapt their position (Cooney, 1974).

Cooney stresses that the Consultation participants largely agreed that the Catholic Church's application of mixed marriage legislation in Ireland was more restrictive than elsewhere. The Catholic Bishops' stance was viewed as a major barrier to reconciliation between the religious communities, and their absence from the Consultation raised further concerns. Cooney speculates that the bishops' reluctance to engage in open debate may have been an effort to avoid uncomfortable discussions about liberalizing their policy on mixed marriages (Cooney, 1974).

A key suggestion from the Consultation came from Fr. Gabriel Daly, who proposed that the unique Irish situation might warrant a reconsideration of the Catholic Church's stance on mixed marriages. He urged the Irish Bishops to submit the matter to Rome for review. However, Cooney suggests that the bishops' reluctance to adjust their position stemmed from a refusal to acknowledge the broader social and political implications of their policies (Cooney, 1974).

Cooney's article underscores the responsibility of the Church in addressing the tensions surrounding mixed marriages, urging Irish Church leaders to take practical steps toward reconciliation, but only emphasizes the role of the Catholic hierarchy. Conney makes clear, however, that the Church's role in easing sectarian tensions was seen as crucial, with mixed marriage legislation at the forefront of potential change (Cooney, 1974).

According to Lennon, the primary challenge in mixed marriages lies in the education of the children. *Matrimonia Mixta* acknowledges that both parents share responsibility for educational decisions but asserts that the Catholic partner must do everything in their power to raise the children as members of the Church. The non-Catholic partner, however, is no longer required to make the same commitment (Lennon, 1980).

Two key factors were especially important to the Irish Catholic hierarchy—one ecumenical and the other doctrinal. First, in agreement with the Irish Council of Churches, the hierarchy emphasized that "Christian faith and love, along with Christian understandings of marriage and parenthood, should take priority over social and economic factors." Second, in line with *Matrimonia Mixta*, the Irish Bishops maintained that mixed marriages could not resolve Church disunity. *Matrimonia Mixta* "acknowledged the differences that remain between the Churches while recognizing the right of individuals to marry." Catholic authorities argued that these differences could undermine the faith of their members if they married outside the Catholic Church (Lennon, 1980).

Lennon asserts that the "problem" of mixed marriages is "urgent," as it causes pain for families and negatively impacts interchurch relations in Ireland. He argues that unless the Churches address this issue creatively, it will be impossible to fulfill the ecumenical promises of the Second Vatican Council and the spiritual vision of Pope John Paul II—one that emphasizes the importance of family, peace, and ecumenism (Lennon, 1980). Tensions between the Churches in Ireland, particularly over mixed marriages, remain evident in discussions such as those held by the Joint Standing Committee on Mixed Marriages and in reports from interchurch talks at Ballymascanlon in 1977. The issue continued to be widely contentious.

Before the Ballymascanlon Talks, the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) at Trinity College Dublin played a key role in laying the groundwork for interchurch dialogue and providing a platform for deeper discussions. The ISE's emphasis on joint study and a comprehensive approach, which included Interchurch Relations, Interfaith Relations, and Peace Studies, set the stage for more formal discussions between the Protestant and Catholic communities. In 1973, the ISE appointed three staff members to conduct research on mixed marriages, leading to the International Consultation on Mixed Marriage, which was sponsored by the ISE in 1974. This initiative created the intellectual framework for the Ballymascanlon talks of 1977 which focused on the delicate and often contentious relationship between Irish Catholicism and Protestantism and directly addressed mixed marriage as central to the conflict (Hurley and Ellis, 1998).

The contrasting approaches of the Irish and Swiss Bishops to mixed marriages during the 1970s highlight the broader tensions within the Catholic Church regarding ecumenism and reconciliation. While the Swiss Bishops used *Matrimonia Mixta* as an opportunity to foster unity and healing between Catholic and Protestant communities, the Irish Bishops' more restrictive response missed the opportunity to engage with the ecumenical spirit of the document. The Ballymascanlon talks, which took place in Ireland, were a significant demonstration of the potential for dialogue in bridging divides between Protestant and Catholic communities. Held between 1973 and 1977, these talks represented a promising example of interchurch dialogue and cooperation at a time when sectarian tensions were high. The talks highlighted the importance of direct engagement between clergy and theologians from different denominations, addressing crucial issues such as mixed marriages, baptism, and the role of the Church in fostering peace.

Although the Ballymascanlon talks did not immediately resolve the deep-seated divisions in Irish society, they showed the potential for dialogue to address the underlying issues of sectarianism and interfaith conflict. They underscored the value of creating spaces for open discussion, where both Protestant and Catholic representatives could engage in respectful exchange and work toward mutual understanding. In particular, the discussions on mixed marriages during the Ballymascanlon talks echoed the need for a more flexible and ecumenically sensitive approach—one that was sorely lacking in the Irish Bishops' response to *Matrimonia Mixta*.

Cooney's critique further emphasizes the missed opportunity for the Irish Bishops to follow the example of the Swiss Bishops, who used *Matrimonia Mixta* as a platform to promote healing and reconciliation. The failure of the Irish Bishops to embrace a more ecumenical approach left a significant gap in fostering reconciliation, not only between

Catholics and Protestants but also within Irish society as a whole. The Ballymascanlon talks, as part of a broader trend toward ecumenical dialogue in Ireland, provided a hopeful sign that constructive conversation could lead to progress in overcoming sectarian divides. However, the Irish Church's reluctance to adapt its stance on mixed marriages and engage more fully in these conversations left unresolved the tensions that continued to fuel violent conflict in Northern Ireland.

Ultimately, the potential for peacebuilding and reconciliation in Ireland—highlighted by the Ballymascanlon talks—could have been further strengthened had the Irish Bishops been more receptive to the ecumenical opportunities presented by the Swiss approach and other international examples. The violence of the Troubles was a prime motivator for the need for change. However, by embracing dialogue and acknowledging the broader social and political implications of their policies, the Irish Bishops were still able to contribute more effectively to the process of healing and unity, even if their responses came later than desired.

The Diocese of Ferns Reports

After two years of in-depth discussions, the Diocese of Ferns unveiled two groundbreaking documents in 1986: *Interchurch Marriages* and *Joint Pastoral Care of Interchurch Marriages*. These reports outline the pastoral strategies of both the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church regarding interchurch marriages, revealing a strong ecumenical spirit. At a time when tensions and differing priorities between the two churches persisted, the reports offered a glimmer of hope for bridging divides. Their primary goal was to create a sustainable framework for pastoral care while fostering ongoing dialogue between the denominations. The reports also emphasize the shared Christian values between the two traditions, paving the way for deeper unity. In the foreword, Brendan Comiskey, the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Ferns, and Noel Willoughby, Bishop of Cashel, Waterford, and Lismore, powerfully express that, "It is only by keeping focus on what we share in common that we shall be encouraged and, indeed, empowered to continue working to break down the barriers which separate the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ from one another" (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

The first booklet, *Interchurch Marriages*, offers a thorough exploration of the theological and legal perspectives of both the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic

Church regarding interchurch marriages. It not only outlines the current landscape but also suggests steps for progress, highlighting shared values between the two churches. The second booklet, *Joint Pastoral Care of Interchurch Marriages*, shifts the focus to pastoral concerns, offering clergy from both churches guidance on the specific legal and pastoral responsibilities they have when preparing for, celebrating, and providing care to interchurch couples (Cosgrave, 1988).

In the first booklet, the authors set both long-term and short-term goals. In the long run, they aim to tackle deeper theological and structural questions concerning the Church's nature, mission, and regulations. In the short term, they seek to encourage collaboration between clergy from both churches, enhancing the support offered to couples and fostering lasting relationships that will benefit future generations. The authors express optimism that this cooperation will lead to unexpected, fruitful outcomes (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

In January 1985, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Rt. Revd. Noel Willoughby and Most Revd. Brendan Comiskey issued a statement acknowledging that as long as the churches remain divided, mixed marriages will face significant challenges. While both churches do not actively encourage such marriages, they recognize their potential to symbolize the unity all Christians seek in Christ. Both bishops emphasized the churches' shared responsibility to provide thorough pastoral care to mixed marriage couples and families, before and after the wedding. This led to the appointment of V. Rev. David Earl and Rev. Aidan Jones, who specialized in counseling for mixed marriages, and the formation of a committee of priests from both churches to offer appropriate guidance.

The statement also expressed gratitude for the work of the Association of Interchurch Families and sought to address misunderstandings, encourage dialogue on the Christian understanding of marriage, and promote further cooperation between the two churches. Over eight meetings, the clergy worked closely with the bishops to develop proposals for a Joint Statement, addressing the theological, legal, and social implications of interchurch marriage. The resulting report advocates for "full unity between our churches" and offers positive, if not entirely original, suggestions for effective pastoral care (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

The report is structured into three main sections. The first, *Theological Foundations*, delves into topics like Baptism, the Church, the Nature of Marriage, and Roman Catholic claims. The second section, *Consequences for Interchurch Marriages*, examines practical matters such as permissions from the Roman Catholic Bishop, the religious upbringing of children, the canonical form of marriage, and intercommunion. The final section, *An Approach to Interchurch Marriages*, tackles the opportunities and challenges of interchurch marriages and the pastoral care required for couples navigating these complexities. Each subsection is concise yet comprehensive (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

The report emphasizes the shared sacrament of Baptism between the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland, underscoring the unity of their Christian foundations. However, it also highlights significant theological differences, especially in their definitions of "sacrament." One of the most contentious issues addressed is the Catholic Church's view that "the Church of Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church," a claim which the Church of Ireland rejects. The report, however, acknowledges the Catholic Church's recognition of the elements of sanctification and truth present in other Christian communities, reflecting the changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

Another major point of contention is the Roman Catholic Church's claim of authority over marriage, a position the Church of Ireland disputes. According to Catholic doctrine, the Roman Catholic partner must seek permission from their bishop, and there are significant concerns regarding the religious upbringing of children. The Catholic Church requires the Roman Catholic partner to promise to raise the children in the Catholic faith, while the Church of Ireland holds that parents should decide how to raise their children within the context of their marriage (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

The issue of the children's religious upbringing remains one of the most contentious aspects of interchurch marriages. The Catholic Church requires the Roman Catholic partner to promise to baptize and raise the children in the Catholic Church, a condition the Church of Ireland sees as restricting the couple's freedom. The Church of Ireland views this as a potential strain on the marriage itself, as the Catholic Church's emphasis on maintaining a Catholic household may overshadow the couple's commitment to fostering a healthy and harmonious relationship. Moreover, the Church of Ireland perceives the Catholic Church's regulations as overly focused on protecting the Catholic partner's faith rather than recognizing the potential benefits of the interchurch marriage (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

While both Churches discourage interchurch marriages due to the challenges they present, the Church of Ireland criticizes the Catholic Church's regulatory stance, particularly regarding the requirement for permission from the Roman Catholic bishop. The Church of Ireland, unlike the Catholic Church, recognizes the validity of civil marriages and sees the Catholic Church's insistence on its authority over marriage as an obstacle to greater unity (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

The issue of intercommunion remains a key point of divergence between the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland. Roman Catholic ecclesiology strictly forbids intercommunion, except in rare and exceptional cases. In contrast, the Church of Ireland takes a more inclusive approach, allowing anyone baptized in the name of the Trinity and in good standing with their own church to partake in the Eucharist. This difference in practice has raised concerns within the Church of Ireland regarding the influence of Catholic traditions on interchurch marriages, particularly in relation to the dynamics of shared faith and unity in these unions (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

The report ultimately concludes that the theological divisions between the two churches lie at the heart of the challenges facing interchurch marriages. As long as these divisions persist, a full agreement on interchurch marriage will remain elusive. Yet, despite this ongoing separation, the report acknowledges significant strides forward, particularly citing the reforms introduced by Vatican II in 1970. These changes have led to a more nuanced understanding of interchurch marriages and helped reduce mutual suspicion and misconceptions between the two churches and their followers (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

In a hopeful tone, the report advocates for a new, more positive view of interchurch marriages—one that celebrates the shared Christian values and traditions of both the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church. Emphasizing the possibility for further progress, the report concludes that "further progress is possible" in the ecumenical movement, encouraging ongoing dialogue and cooperation (Diocese of Ferns, 1986).

The Diocese of Ferns' second report, *Joint Pastoral Care of Interchurch Marriages: Pastoral Preparation and Legal Requirements,* follows up on the success of the first report. It was warmly received by both bishops, Rt. Revd. Noel Willoughby and Most Revd. Brendan Comiskey, and also gained recognition beyond the diocese for its valuable contribution to discussions on interchurch marriage. The second report acknowledges that while the first document did not aim to cover every theological or legal aspect, it offered fresh perspectives and helped lay the foundation for collaborative pastoral care and preparation for interchurch couples (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

The second report starts by reinforcing the Christian bond shared between the two churches, encouraging clergy to view interchurch marriages as an opportunity to deepen Christian unity. It acknowledges both the challenge of forming a "truly Christian family" and the opportunity these marriages represent in symbolizing the unity the churches should strive for. The report outlines a collaborative approach for clergy in preparing couples for interchurch marriages, noting that the success and harmony of these unions depend largely on the personal relationship between the Catholic and Church of Ireland clergy. Therefore, fostering friendly and respectful relations between clergy from both traditions is essential for effective pastoral support. In the spirit of ecumenism, clergy are encouraged to assist couples in preparing for a Christian marriage grounded in mutual respect and understanding (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

To ensure effective and compassionate pastoral care, the report stresses the importance for clergy to be thoroughly familiar with both their own church's teachings on marriage and the practices of the other church. This deep knowledge will help them overcome misinformation and biases, allowing them to offer informed and supportive guidance to interchurch couples (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

The report also outlines the specific pastoral care requirements for interchurch marriages, starting with the process of "Meeting the Couple." For the Roman Catholic Church, the couple should meet with the Catholic priest at least three months before the wedding. The priest will then encourage the couple to contact the Church of Ireland clergyman promptly, inform the Roman Catholic partner about the pre-marriage course requirement, and explain the process of publishing marriage banns unless pastoral reasons suggest otherwise (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

For the Church of Ireland, the couple must meet with the rector at least two months before the wedding. The rector will explain the Church of Ireland's stance on marriage and clarify that no prior commitment regarding the religious upbringing of children is required for the marriage to take place within the Church of Ireland. The couple will also be informed about the licensing process, which differs from the Catholic approach, as banns are not possible in interchurch marriages. In certain cases, a special license may be required, and the couple must go through the necessary steps to ensure that there are no legal impediments to their marriage (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

Following the initial meetings, both churches' clergy will maintain communication to address any issues related to the upcoming marriage. The Roman Catholic priest will discuss the legal requirements of the Catholic Church, including the need for permission from the bishop and a promise regarding the religious upbringing of children. If the marriage will be celebrated in the Church of Ireland, the priest will also address the requirement for a dispensation from canonical form. The Church of Ireland clergyman will ensure that the couple is informed of the relevant procedures for both churches and will assist in the completion of necessary documents, including baptismal certificates and prenuptial inquiry forms (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

The Church of Ireland is also expected to meet with the couple to clarify the conditional nature of the promise the Roman Catholic partner is required to make. It should be explained that this promise does not "exclude the partners from freely exercising their equal responsibility for the baptism and religious upbringing of their children." Following this explanation, both parties and their respective clergy are to meet to discuss the matters surrounding the interchurch marriage. During this meeting, the Church of Ireland rector will reassure the couple that the promise will be understood as conditional, as previously explained. The clergy should also work together to provide joint pastoral care for the couple during this time (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

The next section of the report details the procedures for celebrating the wedding service. If the wedding is held in the Roman Catholic Church, either within or outside of Mass, the Roman Catholic marriage rite should be used. Ideally, the Church of Ireland rector will be invited to attend, seated in a place of honor, and dressed in appropriate liturgical attire. The Roman Catholic priest is expected to invite the rector to participate by offering words of greeting, exhortation, and additional prayers and blessings. If Mass is not celebrated, the

Church of Ireland clergyman may also read a lesson and/or preach (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

If the interchurch marriage is celebrated in the Church of Ireland with the proper dispensation, the Roman Catholic priest should be invited to participate. The Catholic priest should wear liturgical attire and take part in the ceremony in a manner similar to the Church of Ireland clergyman's role in a Roman Catholic wedding. The priest may read a lesson and preach, provided that the marriage service is not part of a Holy Communion service. However, under Roman Catholic tradition, a Catholic priest cannot conduct a marriage using Church of Ireland marriage rites. A blessing or thanksgiving service before the marriage ceremony is allowed, but a second marriage rite is not. Additionally, intercommunion is not permitted during an interchurch wedding. If the ceremony is held in the Roman Catholic Church, the civil register is signed according to standard practice (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

When the marriage is celebrated in the Church of Ireland, the Church of Ireland marriage rites must be used. Both churches' clergy should consult each other, and the Church of Ireland is expected to invite the Roman Catholic priest to assist. The Church of Ireland rector will administer the vows, while the Catholic priest should be given a meaningful role in the ceremony. The Church of Ireland clergyman can only be involved in a Roman Catholic ceremony if the conditions regarding the religious upbringing of children are clear and agreed upon, and the bishop must be notified before any invitation for participation is extended (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

When it comes to registering a marriage, the procedures vary depending on where the wedding takes place. If the ceremony is held in the Roman Catholic Church, the marriage is registered in the Church's official register, as is customary. However, if the marriage occurs in the Church of Ireland with the necessary dispensation, it must also be registered in the Roman Catholic parish where the wedding was held. A notification of the marriage is then sent to the parish where the Roman Catholic partner was baptized, and the priest retains the relevant documents in the parish archives (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

Under civil law, the couple must submit the signed civil marriage certificate to the appropriate authorities. Typically, this is done by the priest at the wedding venue if the ceremony takes place in the Roman Catholic Church. If the Church of Ireland requires the paperwork, the priest will provide the necessary documents to confirm the marriage (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

For a marriage held outside a church, a Special License is required. In the Church of Ireland, an ordinary license must be given to the officiating clergyman before the wedding, enabling the rector to register the marriage. For a Special License, the groom must obtain a certificate from the Diocesan Registrar. After the marriage is solemnized, the certificate must be sent to the Registrar General in Dublin, signed by the couple, two witnesses, and the officiating clergyman. If the marriage occurs in a church, it is registered in the Church's records, but for marriages outside a church, the Special License ensures proper registration. The priest must then collaborate with the Church of Ireland rector to ensure all legalities are handled (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

The report's final section shifts focus to the pastoral care of interchurch couples. Clergy who prepare the couple for marriage are expected to inform the parish where the couple will reside. Both Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland clergy in that parish should meet to discuss the best way to provide joint pastoral care for the couple (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

Regular pastoral visits to the couple's home are strongly encouraged, helping the couple live out their marriage in a "truly Christian way." Clergy should also work together to foster a Christian atmosphere in the couple's home by encouraging joint prayer and supporting them in participating in each other's church services when possible (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

The report urges clergy to guide the couple in developing "a truly ecumenical and mutually acceptable practice" in their religious life. This involves participating in services across both churches, including baptisms, Eucharists, confirmations, weddings, harvest thanksgivings, funerals, and other rituals. The Roman Catholic priest will inform the couple that intercommunion is prohibited by Catholic regulations, while the Church of Ireland will clarify that its policy allows anyone "baptized in the Trinitarian faith and in good standing in their own Church" to receive Holy Communion (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

The report also addresses the important issue of baptizing children in interchurch marriages, advising couples to choose one church for the baptism. It cautions against baptizing a child in both churches, as this could lead to “practical difficulties” later regarding communion, confirmation, and marriage. The report encourages active involvement from the non-baptizing parent in the ceremony and suggests inviting clergy from the other church to participate, perhaps by reading scripture, offering prayers, or giving a blessing (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987). Ultimately, interchurch couples face numerous binary decisions designed to avoid such “practical difficulties” within a system that remains inherently insular.

The concluding section of the report examines the theology underpinning interchurch regulations in both traditions. For the Roman Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council states that the Church of Christ “subsists in the Roman Catholic Church,” a phrase that replaced an earlier draft that explicitly identified the Roman Catholic Church as the sole Church of Christ. The revised wording acknowledges that other Christian churches and ecclesial communities may possess some elements of sanctification and truth, though the Catholic Church maintains that it holds the fullness of the means of salvation (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

This distinction reflects the Roman Catholic Church's belief in its unique role in God's plan of salvation, a stance that continues to shape its regulations on interchurch marriages, particularly concerning intercommunion (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987). The Church of Ireland, on the other hand, rejects this exclusive view and has developed its own regulations for interchurch marriage. The Church of Ireland’s Preamble and Declaration highlights its ecumenical approach and commitment to fostering unity with other Christian denominations, while maintaining its theological identity and respecting its distinctiveness (The Diocese of Ferns, 1987).

Through these detailed guidelines, the Diocese of Ferns provides a clear framework for the joint pastoral care of interchurch marriages, ensuring that both clergy and couples navigate these relationships with respect, understanding, and shared Christian values. The reports emphasize pastoral care, doctrinal understanding, and practical procedures, encouraging collaboration between clergy from both traditions to support couples in their faith journey. By fostering mutual respect and ecumenical engagement, the report aims to facilitate cooperation while recognizing the unique identities of each Church.

However, the report also points to areas for growth and development. The ongoing doctrinal divide over intercommunion remains a significant challenge to full unity, and the binary approach to decisions like baptism and religious upbringing may put pressure on couples to conform to one tradition. While the report fosters cooperation, it could advocate for more inclusive practices that respect both partners' traditions. Despite its vital contribution to interchurch marriage preparation, the Ferns Report leaves room for further development in promoting a flexible, inclusive approach that better serves the diverse needs of couples in today’s evolving ecumenical landscape.

The ecumenical actions of the Irish churches on mixed marriages reflect a significant evolution in both theological and social approaches to interfaith relations, particularly in the context of the Troubles. The changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council were pivotal, leading to a shift in the Catholic Church’s stance on ecumenism, including the adoption of the *Matrimonia Mixta* decree on mixed marriages. This shift fostered a more open and inclusive approach, encouraging dialogue and cooperation between Christian denominations. The Irish churches, particularly through initiatives like the Ballymascanlon talks and the work of the Irish School of Ecumenics, played an instrumental role in fostering reconciliation and addressing sectarian tensions. However, this central role does not erase a history in which they contributed to solidifying those same divisions.

Although these efforts led to significant steps toward mutual understanding, exemplified by the work of the Diocese of Ferns, which sought to promote greater acceptance and pastoral care for mixed-marriage couples, much work remains to be done. The response of the Irish Bishops initially lagged behind international examples, including when urgency was of the utmost importance. Yet, their eventual embrace of dialogue and acknowledgment of the broader social and political implications of their policies contributed to a more ecumenically sensitive approach. While these efforts laid the groundwork for greater unity and healing, progress remains slow, and the Irish churches must build upon this foundation to truly achieve unity between these disparate groups.

Mixed Marriage and Childrearing in Modernity

She married me, in spite of the tribe,
And she travelled with me, in spite of the tribe.
She gave me Zeynab and Omar, in spite of the tribe.
And when I used to ask her
Why she would take me like a child, against her chest
"Because you are my tribe."
- *Syrian Poet Nizar Qabbani*

In societies with deep communal divisions, such as Northern Ireland, mixed marriages remain a source of tension, challenging entrenched sectarian identities. These unions force individuals to confront the complexities of navigating a world that marginalizes them, often viewing their relationships as a threat to the purity of the communal divide. For those marrying outside their "tribe," the societal consequences are stark, with both personal and familial struggles. The division between Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland, one of the most visible and entrenched legacies of sectarianism, continues to shape the lives of mixed-marriage couples. Despite progress since the Northern Irish Peace Process, the country remains deeply segregated, and interfaith marriages often result in immense societal pressure and exclusion. These divisions create overt and subtle barriers, affecting not only couples but also their children.

The treatment of mixed-marriage couples by religious institutions can significantly influence their involvement in religious life. Supportive clergy and communities encourage couples to maintain their faith, while exclusionary practices often drive them away, leading to a decline in church attendance and membership. As some couples feel excluded, they may seek alternative ways to express their faith, distancing themselves further from institutional religious life. Despite some positive changes, significant barriers remain in navigating differing faiths, highlighting the ongoing need for greater religious tolerance and acceptance (McLaughlin, 2012).

Mixed marriages in Northern Ireland represent a significant challenge in a society still marked by deep sectarian divisions. Couples who marry across religious boundaries face considerable societal pressure and exclusion, navigating barriers in housing, education, and religious practices that reinforce segregation. Resistance to hybridity—both cultural and religious—profoundly impacts mixed families and their children, who must negotiate complex identities in a divided environment. Although there has been some progress, such as the growing acceptance of intermarriage and the concept of "double-belonging" for children, institutional and cultural forces continue to perpetuate division. The hope for a more integrated future lies in dismantling these structural barriers and fostering greater religious and social tolerance (McLaughlin, 2015; Morgan et al., 1996).

The fear of intermarriage in identity-focused, socially segregated communities is partly rooted in concerns over racial, cultural, or political "impurity." When members of different communities marry and raise children who cannot be categorized as definitively belonging to one group or the other, the perceived purity of race or religion is threatened. Intermarriage is often opposed due to communal anxieties over the "purity" of their race or religion. This fear excludes large segments of the community from the possibility of a "covenant alliance." When someone breaks this social pact by marrying outside their community, both communities may demand that the individual forge a new identity. In this context, interfaith marriages are often only accepted with prior conversion. By 1996, forty percent of those in mixed marriages had converted to their spouse's faith (Morgan et al., 1996). Over time, however, the likelihood of interchurch marriages occurring without repercussions or dismissal from the church has increased, leading to a decline in marital conversions (Reaves, 2008). Both Protestant and Catholic clergy in Northern Ireland and the Republic have made efforts in recent decades to address the complexities of mixed marriages. These initiatives, coupled with increased dialogue between Protestant and Catholic clergy, have contributed to a more relaxed stance toward mixed marriages among the clergy.

However, some ministers still refuse to participate in mixed marriages and may advise couples against them. This opposition is partly due to the rarity of mixed marriages among Protestant and Catholic clergy, leaving them with limited experience to guide their responses. In the Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent the Church of Ireland, local bishops often set the tone on mixed marriages for the entire diocese. Protestant denominations like the Presbyterian Church, with a more decentralized structure, exhibit discrepancies in attitudes across neighboring congregations. Opposition to mixed marriages remains high in some smaller, more evangelical Protestant denominations, where the theological differences between Protestantism and Catholicism are considered so profound that any cooperation, including marriage ceremonies, is deemed inadmissible (Morgan et al., 1996).

In modern times, many couples choose to marry without obtaining approval from religious authorities, despite the Catholic Church's canon law demanding it. With rising secularization, more couples appear indifferent to the church where they marry or who officiates the ceremony. In Belfast, for example, couples often prioritize the location of the church over its denominational affiliation, favoring venues like Saint Anne's, Saint George's, or Saint Mary's. This shift reflects a growing disregard for the potential threat of excommunication for marrying across community lines (Reaves, 2008).

In recent decades, as ethnoreligious sectarianism has become more politically charged and less religiously motivated, Protestants are more likely to oppose interchurch marriages than Catholics. A 1991 Social Attitudes survey found that 54 percent of Catholics supported interchurch marriages, compared to only 34 percent of Protestants. Protestant opposition is also linked to the historical impact of Catholic canon law, which is perceived to have contributed to a decline in Protestant numbers. By 1996, half of the children from mixed marriages were raised Catholic, though not all of the remaining children were raised Protestant, with some raised interfaith or non-religious. The Catholic Church's rigid stance historically fueled Protestant fears of "a progressive weakening" of their numbers in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. Some Presbyterian clergy still refuse to allow a Catholic priest to officiate in their church, while others encourage conversion to the Church of Ireland (Morgan et al., 1996; Reaves, 2008).

Politics in Northern Ireland is heavily influenced by the Protestant majority, which has been in decline. In 1901, the Protestant population numbered 343,000, but by 1961, this number had decreased to 144,000. The political discourse surrounding the Northern Irish census often centers on "sectarian head counting," determining whether the Protestant majority still holds sway in the six counties of Northern Ireland. If the Protestant population continues to shrink, the possibility of a vote for a 32-county Irish Republic increases. As a result, there has been little effort to expand the understanding of Northern Irish identity beyond the dualistic framework of Protestant versus Catholic (McLaughlin, 2015).

Although historical data on mixed marriages is incomplete—many mixed couples do not have their unions officiated by either civil or religious authorities—research indicates that the phenomenon of mixed marriages is on the rise, transcending social class boundaries. The most comprehensive study on interchurch marriages in Northern Ireland, conducted by Gillian Robinson and Katrina Lloyd in 2008, found that individuals in mixed relationships were three times as likely to remain unmarried (12 percent) compared to those in same-community relationships. Respondents in mixed relationships tended to be younger, better educated, and wealthier. They were also more likely to have lived abroad (35 percent compared to 16 percent), with twice as many sending their children to integrated schools (35 percent vs. 16 percent). Notably, 17 percent of adults in mixed partnerships supported the moderate Alliance

Party, compared to only 9 percent of same-community respondents. Furthermore, 59 percent of individuals in mixed marriages identified as neither Nationalist nor Unionist, compared to only 27 percent in same-community unions. These findings suggest that while social segregation limits the prevalence of intermarriage, those who choose to marry across communal boundaries are often more open to challenging ethnoreligious segregation and boundary-keeping (Robinson & Lloyd, 2008).

In Northern Ireland, where sectarianism remains a contentious issue, education, public housing, and politics are all segregated along ethnoreligious lines. Key institutions—such as churches, school administrators, and public housing officials—play a significant role in maintaining these divisions. This segregation forces individuals to caricature the "Other," exacerbating communal tensions. In contrast, Protestants in the Republic of Ireland, though a minority, are less defined by concerns with sectarianism and wield less political power. Nevertheless, they face distinct challenges compared to their northern counterparts (Madden, 2010).

However, despite these barriers, the growing acceptance of mixed marriages, the rising secularization, and the increasing willingness of individuals to challenge ethnoreligious divisions suggest that these boundaries are not set in stone. As societal attitudes continue to evolve, particularly among younger generations who are more likely to embrace integrated education and progressive political ideologies, there is a growing possibility that the long-standing barriers separating Protestant and Catholic communities may be overcome. This shift represents not just a challenge to historical sectarianism but also an opportunity for greater reconciliation and unity in a more pluralistic and inclusive society.

Segregated Housing

Despite the Good Friday Agreement's goal of promoting integrated education, progress has been slow. By 2021, only a small percentage of schools in Northern Ireland were classified as integrated, with most children still attending segregated Catholic or Protestant institutions. This system fosters alienation for children who do not fit neatly into one community, subjecting them to bullying, exclusion, and social tension. The decision of where to send children to school becomes fraught with challenges, as parents navigate both educational needs and the pressure to conform to religious or political labels. Mixed-marriage families often face intense pressure to raise their children within a single religious tradition to avoid social rejection, marginalizing children with more complex identities (McLaughlin, 2015).

The scale of ethnoreligious segregation in Northern Ireland presents significant obstacles for mixed marriages and cross-community childrearing, with housing segregation being particularly visible. Before World War II, local councils managed public housing in

Northern Ireland, but with the establishment of the Northern Ireland Housing Trust in 1945, public housing became increasingly unaffordable for those in greatest need. This led to unequal access for Catholics, which became a major political issue and spurred the formation of a civil rights movement in the 1960s, advocating for fair housing. After the shift to direct rule from Westminster in 1972, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was created to make housing less politically influenced and more equitable (Morgan et al., 1996).

Public-sector housing has long been politically charged in Northern Ireland. Residential segregation existed before the Troubles, with public housing typically divided by denomination. The violence of the Troubles deepened this divide, as residents fled mixed neighborhoods for more homogenous areas, resulting in the construction of "peace walls" that remain today. By 1993, nearly half of Northern Ireland’s 1.5 million population lived in areas that were over 90 percent Protestant or Catholic. While private-sector housing is also segregated, the most intense violence has occurred in public housing areas (Morgan et al., 1996).

Integrated neighborhoods are limited, typically smaller, higher-income areas that make up a minority of the housing market. These areas are designed so that no denomination exceeds 70 percent of the population. Mixed-marriage couples with the financial means to purchase homes, rather than rely on public housing, have more options. However, low-income families, particularly those dependent on public housing, are at greater risk of living in sectarian areas (Morgan et al., 1996). The Housing Executive policy aimed at promoting integrated housing has struggled due to deep-seated mistrust between communities, leading many people to prefer to live with others from the same group. As one Housing Executive official noted, there are no specific policies for mixed-marriage couples, and housing decisions are largely left to individual officers (Morgan et al., 1996).

Despite these challenges, there are signs of progress and a growing potential for change. A 2010 Belfast Telegraph study found that 80 percent of participants favored mixed housing and integrated schools for their children (Madden, 2010). This suggests that while deep-rooted segregation continues to pose significant challenges, public attitudes are shifting, with many individuals expressing support for integrated living and education. The primary obstacle to desegregating Northern Ireland’s housing and educational institutions appears to lie in the influence of political and religious elites, rather than widespread public resistance.

As more people show interest in integrated environments, the possibility for change grows, indicating that the barriers of sectarianism may be overcome with time, especially if public pressure continues to challenge the status quo.

Dual Identity in a Segregated Society

Couples are not the only people impacted by the dualistic nature of Irish society. Children of interchurch marriages and cross-community unions add more complexities to how a family interacts with governmental and religious institutions. *Mixed Marriages in Northern Ireland: Institutional Responses* outlines key “stress points for people in mixed marriages.” The text observes that these stress points are all based on interchurch couples having to cooperate with overarching social and/or administrative structures that do not accommodate the needs of people who do not fit into the dualistic constructs of Northern Irish society. Although, in some cases, the birth of a child can bring together religiously divided families, it can also escalate familial and communal conflict with cultural issues such as naming the child, baptism, first communion, and schooling. Concerns particularly arise with the birth of children when the parents want to maintain a religious dimension in their own and their children’s lives (Morgan et al., 1996). The primary tensions are matters of identity, on the psychological and social level, as was outlined above in the section on social identity theory: baptism and first communion; legal formalities and employment; and education.

Children of mixed marriages, often referred to as "interchurch children," face unique challenges in navigating their religious and community identities. These children live with the complexities of being connected to both Catholic and Protestant communities, creating a dual identity that does not easily fit into the rigid societal structure of Northern Ireland. The concept of "double-belonging," where children are expected to identify with both religious traditions, creates both opportunities and tensions. Key religious practices such as baptism and first communion present challenges for children of mixed marriages. These rites are deeply tied to identity within Northern Ireland’s dualistic framework, with baptism and first communion marking a child’s affiliation with either the Catholic or Protestant tradition. The choice of which community to baptize a child into can cause tensions, particularly if one partner feels their religious tradition is being undermined.

According to NIMMA, on the matter of interpersonal identity, interchurch children are blessed and special in their own right. They call this blessing “double-belonging” or “having a foot in both camps.” This affirmation of dual identity asserts that rather than the empty concept of being neither, interchurch children can benefit from the culture and values of both of their parents and their ideological lineage. Religious affiliation proves here to be about more than just dogma, belief, and Church but also about community and culture. Laura Spiers, at age 12, wrote a poem entitled, *“Being Interchurch in N. Ireland”* (McLaughlin, 2015). The verses are as follows:

I’m an Interchurch kid,
Living in Ulster Mid.
At school they think I’m weird,
Cos if I’m not one of the other,
With the right view,
Then maybe I’m a Jew.

As I’m obviously,
Not black or brown or yellow,
Just like St. Paul,
I may not be understood,
If I think my neighbour can be anyone,
Black or brown or yellow,
Catholic or Protestant.

I’m lucky, not weird,
Cos with peace in my heart,
No anger or fears,
I’ve hope for the future,
One with no tears.

Her poem is to be found in *Celebrating the Work, Evaluating the Impact: 1974-2007*, and the Saint Paul’s allusion is a reference to Acts 21, showing the obvious compatibility of her Christian lineages (Reaves, 2008). For children of mixed marriages, the pressure to conform to one side of the religious divide can be overwhelming. However, the concept of "double-belonging," as proposed by NIMMA, offers a potential path forward, allowing children to embrace both their Catholic and Protestant heritages and forge an identity that transcends sectarian boundaries. Ultimately, the experiences of interchurch children reflect the broader struggles of a society still grappling with its divided past, with hope lying in the recognition and acceptance of multiple, intertwined identities (McLaughlin, 2015).

Baptism and First Communion

The religious practices of baptism and first communion, often seen as markers of denominational identity, can create tension for children of mixed marriages. These public rites are seen by the extended family and wider community as defining "which side" the child has chosen. When a child takes their first communion, it is perceived as a formal acceptance into the communicant membership of either the Catholic Church or a Protestant denomination. In the case of mixed marriages, this event serves as a public statement of allegiance to one parent's religious tradition over the other (Morgan et al., 1996).

As noted earlier, there is a generational shift in Ireland toward secularization, with young couples marrying less frequently. However, despite this trend, many still feel compelled to baptize their children, especially given the cultural conservatism prevalent in Northern Ireland. While interchurch couples are no longer as pressured to convert, the question of how to navigate religious rituals, such as baptisms, has become more complex. The desire to baptize children in both traditions—reflecting both parents' identities—has become a significant source of tension.

Historically, joint or ecumenical baptisms were more common, where clergy from both traditions officiated, symbolizing unity. However, in recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to arrange such joint baptisms, as church authorities from both sides have expressed opposition (Reaves, 2008). The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) has advocated for joint baptisms as a way of recognizing “double-belonging” for children of mixed marriages. However, religious authorities have resisted, citing theological differences (Reaves, 2008). Similarly, the issue of first communion remains contentious, with the decision about which tradition a child will follow often carrying long-term consequences for their identity and future relationships.

Despite the ongoing cultural and institutional pressures, attitudes toward mixed marriages are evolving, and the possibility for change is growing. As secularization progresses and younger generations become more flexible in their religious practices, the rigid lines between Catholic and Protestant communities may become less significant. NIMMA’s advocacy for joint baptisms is a step toward overcoming these religious divisions and creating space for children to identify with both traditions. Although institutional and cultural forces continue to reinforce separation, the increasing support for mixed marriages and interfaith families signals a potential shift toward greater acceptance and inclusivity. Over time, as more families challenge the status quo, these entrenched barriers can be broken down, allowing for more flexible and inclusive religious practices that reflect the diverse identities of children in mixed marriages (McLaughlin, 2015).

Segregated Education

When it comes to children, education is a key area of societal exclusion and segregation. The very challenges facing children and parents of cross-community families in the school system are directly related to the structure of the Northern Irish education system. The Northern Irish schooling structure reflects a divided society by giving it a concrete manifestation (Morgan et al., 1996). Since the inception of the Northern Irish state, schools in Northern Ireland have seen their mission as serving two separate cultural groups within the community. Separate educational systems have developed to maintain the dual structures of a religiously and culturally divided society. All social structures have been formed on the premise that all people would actively claim an identity of either Catholic or Protestant (Morgan et al., 1996). Morgan et al. address “stress points for people in mixed marriages,” and deem the tension around the education system for interchurch families a critical stress point.

Northern Ireland was slow to pursue greater integration despite what was said in the Good Friday Agreement, when it was declared that Northern Ireland would seek to promote cultural tolerance and social mixing. In the words of the agreement:

> The participants recognise and value the work being done by many organisations to develop reconciliation and mutual understanding and respect between and within communities and traditions, in Northern Ireland and between North and South, they see such work as having a vital role in consolidating peace and political agreement. Accordingly, they pledge their continuing support to such organisations and will positively examine the case for enhanced financial assistance for the work of reconciliation. An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing *(Good Friday Agreement, 1998).*

The Good Friday Agreement also states that Northern Ireland will “place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish medium education in line with current provision for integrated education” (Good Friday Agreement, 1998). The Northern Irish Department of Education reports on its website that, for the year 2020-2021, there were 65 grant-aided integrated schools out of 1,082 total schools in Northern Ireland, with a total enrolment of 10,665 primary pupils and 13,467 post-primary pupils, which has increased by three schools since 2017 when I started this research (Department of Education NI, 2021). However, the relative growth of integrated schools is still relatively slow, and the segregated nature of education in Northern Ireland, with Catholic schools still largely segregated and separate Protestant schools, reflects the continuing social division in the wider society.

Despite the desire for integrated education from the public and consistent reporting to government departments in Northern Ireland, the slow progress and overwhelming partition of educational structures clearly limit opportunities for cross-community children to embrace the "double-belonging" concept. While the integrated school system is growing in numbers, the segregated nature of Northern Ireland's educational system continues to reinforce the idea that children from mixed marriages must still navigate complex boundaries between their parents' traditions, regardless of whether they are in integrated schools or otherwise. This highlights the tension between the public's desire for integrated education and the broader societal and institutional barriers that continue to divide communities along religious lines.

Mixed marriages in Northern Ireland highlight the deep-rooted sectarian divides that continue to shape the region's social, religious, and political landscape. Despite some progress, including a growing acceptance of intermarriage and shifts in religious authority, significant barriers remain, particularly in housing, education, and institutional attitudes. The persistence of communal fears over "impurity" and the political implications of demographic changes further complicate the situation. While mixed marriage couples and their children are more likely to challenge ethnoreligious segregation, they still face societal resistance. The public's increasing desire for integrated housing and education, as seen in surveys, points to a potential for greater social cohesion, but progress is hindered by political and religious elites who continue to uphold the traditional sectarian divide. The future of Northern Ireland's integration lies in overcoming these structural and cultural obstacles.

Summary and Conclusion

The complex relationship between ethnoreligious identity and nationalism in Ireland, particularly in Northern Ireland, has profoundly shaped its political and social landscape. This entanglement of religion and ethnicity not only defined identity but also entrenched divisions that continue to influence contemporary dynamics, including mixed marriages. These divisions can be traced to the British colonial period, through the Reformation, and into the modern era, where religion remains central in shaping political allegiance and social cohesion. The McCann case, which sparked a moral panic in Northern Ireland, played a pivotal role in solidifying pan-Protestant identity, reinforcing Protestant solidarity in opposition to perceived Catholic threats. However, the solidification of Irish Catholic identity had occurred much earlier, rooted in the historical abuses of the Penal Laws and the systemic discrimination against Catholics, which became integral to their collective identity.

Irish churches have acted both as sources of conflict and as agents of peacebuilding. Notable achievements include the Catholic Church's adaptation to mixed marriages, growing cooperation between denominations following Vatican II, and an increasing recognition of shared values across religious lines. However, these advancements face significant setbacks, primarily due to deeply ingrained sectarian attitudes and the continuing influence of religious institutions on marriage laws and education. The emotional attachment to ethnoreligious identity strengthens boundaries that impede reconciliation.

Looking ahead, further progress lies in enhancing interfaith cooperation, expanding dialogue, and fostering inclusive approaches to marriage that transcend religious divisions. Sustained efforts are necessary to ensure continued progress, with both policy and implementation being crucial for supporting and protecting interchurch marriages. By promoting policies that encourage reconciliation and integration, Ireland can continue evolving toward a more inclusive society.

The enduring influence of ethnoreligiosity on Irish life, especially in Northern Ireland, remains evident in structural and ideological forces, as well as in identity-based belief systems. Karpov et al. explore how the merging of ethnonational identities with religious identities in places like Ireland leads to rigid boundaries around membership and affiliation. As Anderson notes, this fusion provides ethnoreligious identity with a sense of historical continuity and future stability. Both Karpov et al. and Seul observe how conflict zones like Northern Ireland intensify the formation of ethnoreligious nationalisms, often by positioning these identities in opposition to an “Other” (Karpov et al., 2012).

Anderson connects the rise of ethnoreligious identity to the formation of the nation-state, suggesting that sovereign nations—and related nationalisms—are “imagined communities” that emerged with the decline of the "divine, hierarchical dynastic realm." This shift allowed nation-states to assert new authority internationally, changing their relationship with religion. The competing nationalisms in Ireland are deeply tied to its British colonial past, Roman imperial history, and the rise of opposing ethnoreligious communities, defined by sectarian fault lines (Anderson, 1991).

Capitalism, particularly print capitalism, played a key role in the emergence of nationalism, argues Anderson. Without it, the denominational divisions created during the Reformation would not have been as effective in shaping modern identity. Anderson highlights that the Reformation, although significant, was less impactful than the proliferation of standardized vernaculars in print. In Ireland, this occurred alongside British anglicization efforts, which relegated Irish and Scottish Gaelic to "uncivilized" vernaculars and reinforced English as the language of power (Anderson, 1991).

In Anderson’s framework, British nationalism is seen as a form of "official nationalism" tied to the legacy of empire, whereas modern nation-states developed a more horizontal sense of camaraderie. Nationalism is not just a political ideology but also a form of collective identity, akin to kinship or religion, that helps define the boundaries of a community. Just as religion satisfies a human need for belonging and continuity, ethnonationalism does the same, with its rites of passage and shared customs (Seul, 2012).

The decline of sacred languages and the rise of vernaculars introduced new linguistic divides. In Ireland, the decline of the Irish language coincided with the process of anglicization, advanced by British and Scottish colonial policies. Irish was gradually pushed to the fringes, while English became the dominant language, reinforcing cultural and political divisions between Catholic nationalists and Protestant unionists. Yet, the language does not define national identity alone, as the Irish language became a politically charged symbol of Irish identity, intertwining ethnolinguistics with ethnoreligiosity in Northern Ireland’s public discourse.

The ethnolinguistic claim to Irishness remains central to the political landscape of Northern Ireland, where the Irish language is not just a marker of identity but also a contested political issue. The rise of lexicographic revolutions emphasized that languages belong to specific groups, reinforcing linguistic continuity while glossing over language evolution, merging, or disappearance. This shift contributed to solidifying national and religious divisions, continuing to affect the lives of individuals in Northern Ireland’s complex sectarian context (Anderson, 1991).

Ethnoreligious narratives, as Smith (2003) shows, have long been integral to national identities, especially within Abrahamic religions. The ancient Israelites, for example, framed their religiosity through peoplehood, asserting a divine covenant with God and a sacred connection to their land. This concept of a divine promise tied to land has been foundational not only in Judaism but also in Christianity. Both religions emphasize a "chosen people" with a divine connection to land, central to self-imagining and territorial claims across Europe. Such narratives often evolve into national revisioning efforts, where a golden age or romanticized pre-colonial era is reclaimed to assert authenticity and power in the present.

Smith emphasizes that origin stories, such as England's national identity shaped by figures like Alfred the Great, are powerful tools for constructing collective identity. These narratives are not merely historical; they serve as cultural memories passed across generations, offering pride and unity that transcend individual experiences. Similarly, Irish, English, and Scottish identities are deeply intertwined with religious and cultural narratives of divine election, territorial inheritance, and historical continuity. These stories continue to define collective identity and shape political and social structures across the British Isles.

As Assman (2006) notes, origin stories act as forms of cultural memory, interpreted and revived to meet contemporary needs. In Northern Ireland, these ethnoreligious narratives continue to shape social and political dynamics, reinforcing the divide between Catholic nationalists and Protestant unionists. These stories inform individuals’ understanding of their place in the world, both in terms of religious tradition and national identity.

Niebuhr explores how denominations are defined by their ethnic character, which can align with national and economic forces. He critiques the purely doctrinal view of denominationalism, emphasizing the importance of history, sociology, and ethics for understanding its political and social implications (Niebuhr, 1929). His perspective clarifies the political divisions in Northern Ireland, where Protestant parties align with capital, and Catholic groups maintain ties to civil rights movements. This distinction highlights how deeply religious identity influences political affiliations.

Smith, and others like Casanova, argue that religion and ethnonationalism continue to shape ethnic belonging, even in a globalized, post-national world. Although church membership has declined, religion remains essential in defining group identity. Secularization has not eliminated ethnoreligious boundaries; rather, it has reinforced them, particularly in conflict zones like Ireland (Karpov et al., 2012). The institutionalization of ethnoreligious identities—such as the Catholic Church's moral authority and the Protestant Ascendancy's connection to the British state—has solidified divisions, despite the decline in church attendance. Even secular individuals retain ties to these ethnoreligious markers, reinforcing social divisions.

The persistence of these divisions reflects the broader role of religion, ethnicity, and social difference in nationalist politics. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" illustrates how group identity is constructed in opposition to an "Other," shaping the negotiations of mixed marriages and the struggles for identity, belonging, and the contested boundaries of ethnoreligious affiliation (Anderson, 1983; Seul, 1999).

The historical entanglement of religion, ethnicity, and politics in Ireland, particularly in relation to mixed marriages, has shaped its sociopolitical and cultural landscape. The persistence of ethnoreligious identity and its emotional attachment continues to challenge efforts toward reconciliation and integration, especially in Northern Ireland. Despite ecumenical and secularization efforts, the legacy of sectarianism remains a defining force in contemporary debates surrounding mixed marriages.

The struggle to overcome sectarianism in Northern Ireland continues to be a complex and deeply rooted challenge. While progress has been made in areas such as interfaith cooperation and policy reform, the emotional and historical attachments to ethnoreligious identities remain powerful forces. Efforts to foster greater understanding and unity, particularly in mixed marriages, face obstacles rooted in centuries of division, fueled by the abuses of the Penal Laws and ongoing tensions stoked by events such as the McCann case. Moving forward, it will be crucial for both Protestant and Catholic communities to engage in sustained dialogue, break down entrenched boundaries, and build shared narratives that transcend sectarian divisions. Only through such efforts can Ireland hope to create a more inclusive society that allows for reconciliation and the integration of multifaceted and diverse identities. The significance of the positive impact of mixed marriage as an expression of ecumenical agency that chimes with the ways in which many church bodies – across most of the churches – seek to foster reconciliation and to steer a path away from the blunt, exclusivist ethno-religious identities that have often lingered in the popular imagination.

Appendix: References

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