

The Religious Condition  
of  
Ireland 1770–1850

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*For Helena and Patrick  
Who never got to Killaloe*

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# The Religious Development of Ireland 1560–1770

The religious condition of Ireland in 1770 was one that was unique in Europe. The established and Protestant Church of Ireland could count on the religious allegiance of between one-tenth and one-eighth of the population of Ireland. The Roman Catholic Church, against which measures, admittedly somewhat half-hearted, had been taken to secure its extinction, still commanded the religious allegiance of four-fifths of the population, and almost as many Protestants worshipped in Presbyterian meeting houses as in the places of worship of the established church. This chapter will seek to explore the reasons for this unusual state of affairs, the origins of which lie in the failure to impose the Protestant Reformation on Ireland in the way that it had, eventually, been imposed on other parts of the British Isles.

## THE FAILURE OF THE REFORMATION 1560–1660

In principle there was no reason why the Reformation should have failed in Ireland. Exactly the same political measures, abjuring papal authority and recognizing the crown as the head of the national church, had been taken in Ireland as they had been in England and Wales. The main difference as far as Ireland was concerned was not in the nature of the legislation but in the method of its implementation, allied to the fact that until the early seventeenth century much of Ireland was outside effective English control. In England and Wales the Reformation had been implemented effectively in even the most isolated and religiously conservative areas by the last quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> In Scotland, which had a separate monarchy until 1603

<sup>1</sup> See especially the discussions of the later stages of the English Reformation in E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, New Haven and London 1992, and R. Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation*, Cambridge 1989. For developments in Wales see Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation*, Cardiff 1997.

and a separate parliament until 1707, the progress of the Reformation was different and its implementation much slower, but even in Scotland, Roman Catholicism had been eradicated from all but parts of the western highlands and islands by the first quarter of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> In Ireland the Reformation was implemented very half-heartedly before about 1590. Though more strenuous measures for implementation were taken thereafter it was by then too late. The deep religious conservatism of both clergy and laity had been tolerated for so long that by the time a fuller Protestantism was on offer in Ireland it was in competition with Counter-Reformation Roman Catholicism imported by priests trained at seminaries in Europe.

This is perhaps an over-simplification of the events of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but it is one on which all historians of Ireland in this period basically agree. The area on which there has been much more discussion and disagreement is whether the Reformation could ever have been implemented in Ireland,<sup>3</sup> some following the lead of Brendan Bradshaw in arguing that there was never much likelihood of the Reformation being successful in a country of such deeply-rooted Catholic loyalties, with the Protestant cause even being considered doomed in Dublin by the early seventeenth century and others supporting the line taken by Nicholas Canny in his seminal article on the topic.<sup>4</sup> Canny argues that both Catholicism and Protestantism were fragile blooms in Ireland and that this remained the case throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with opportunities for either side to strengthen its hold on the population of Ireland. For Canny the decisive step towards confirming that Ireland would always be a predominantly Roman Catholic country, in which Protestantism could make no further headway, was not achieved until the nineteenth century with the failure of the ‘Protestant Crusade’ of proselytization within the Roman Catholic community, and the consolidation and transformation of Irish Roman Catholicism associated with Cardinal Cullen. There is a good deal of strength in Canny’s arguments, as will become clear from some of the later sections of this book, but it is important that it should not be allowed to

<sup>2</sup> For developments in Scotland see I. B. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation*, London 1982. However, C. G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, Edinburgh 1997, 85–8, notes that Church of Scotland ministers, particularly those of lowland origins, were still meeting considerable opposition in parts of the western highlands as late as the early eighteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> For a good summary of this debate see the contributions by James Murray and Alan Ford to ‘The Church of Ireland: A Critical Bibliography’, *Irish Historical Studies*, xxviii (1992–3), 345–58, and K. Bottigheimer and B. Bradshaw, ‘Revisionism and the Irish Reformation’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, li (2000), 581–91.

<sup>4</sup> N. P. Canny, ‘Why the Reformation Failed in Ireland: *Une Question Mal Posée*’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xxx (1979), 423–50. For a direct response see K. Bottigheimer, ‘The Failure of the Reformation in Ireland: *Une Question Bien Posée*’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xxxvi (1985), 196–207.

obscure some of the core reasons as to why the Church of Ireland found itself in the position of being a minority establishment under considerable religious pressure in 1770.

The fundamental difference between Reformation policy in Ireland and that in England and Wales was one of implementation. This can be seen in the most essential aspect of attempting to reform any church, namely in the structure of its senior management. Although in both England and Wales the structure of the pre-Reformation church was not altered, its personnel was. Many clergy certainly remained at their posts in the parishes throughout the religious upheavals between the 1530s and the 1560s but that was not true at a senior level. Of the bishops inherited by Elizabeth I in 1558 only one was prepared to accept the final implementation of a Protestant religious establishment. This was Kitchin of Llandaff who survived in his post until his death in 1566. Another religious conservative, John Salisbury, suffragan bishop of Thetford from 1536, was briefly bishop of Sodor and Man between 1570 and 1573.<sup>5</sup> Apart from these two exceptions, all the other dioceses in the provinces of Canterbury and York were, from 1559, filled by committed Protestants replacing bishops who had either died or been deprived.

In Ireland the situation was wholly different. Far more bishops were prepared to accept the royal supremacy but at the same time to ensure that no steps were made to Protestantize the church in their dioceses. The Dublin-based government was prepared to accept this situation, recognizing that it simply did not have the resources to exercise political control over many parts of Ireland, let alone impose reformed doctrine and religious practice on a deeply conservative church. Provided the bishops were prepared to manifest their loyalty to the English Crown by taking the necessary oaths, no further questions were to be asked and the bishops were allowed to remain in post. The papacy was also prepared to take a similarly pragmatic view with the result that for a substantial period, in the case of the diocese of Achonry until as late as 1603, many Irish dioceses retained bishops recognized by both the crown and the papacy.<sup>6</sup> The exceptions were Kildare and Meath, where bishops who refused to accept the royal supremacy were deprived, and the diocese of Armagh where a vacancy permitted the appointment of a Protestant archbishop, Adam Loftus, in 1562–3.

The survival of ‘church papist’ bishops and archbishops in Ireland throughout much of the sixteenth, and even into the early seventeenth, centuries seriously impeded the implementation of the Reformation in

<sup>5</sup> For the post-Reformation situation in the Isle of Man, see W. N. Yates, ‘The Church in the Isle of Man 1542–1838’, in *New History of the Isle of Man: IV The Derby and Atholl Periods 1405–1830* (forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> For details see Appendix 1.

many parts of the country. The shortage of committed Protestant clergy meant that even when vacant dioceses had to be filled appointments might go to conservative churchmen such as Miler Magrath. Magrath had been provided by the papacy to the see of Down and Connor in 1565, accepted the royal supremacy in 1567, but was not formally deprived until 1580. In the meantime he had acquired royal nomination to the bishopric of Clogher in 1570 and translation to the archbishopric of Cashel in 1571 where he remained until his death in 1622, holding at various periods also the bishoprics of Achonry, Killala, Lismore, and Waterford. ‘Church papist’ bishops made no attempt to proceed any further than the church of Henry VIII’s reign, which rejected papal supremacy but otherwise retained the doctrines and practices of the pre-Reformation church. They were greatly aided by the failure to produce an Irish version of the *Book of Common Prayer* until the first decade of the seventeenth century. In the absence of an Irish text Irish clergy were authorized to use the Latin rather than the English text in those parts of Ireland in which few people spoke English. The retention of a familiar liturgical language facilitated the retention of familiar ceremonial with the result that many ‘conforming beneficed ministers provided a liturgy as papist as they dared’;<sup>7</sup> the fact that Marian Catholicism had been replaced by Elizabethan Protestantism was deliberately obscured by ‘the illicit continuance of previous practices at parish level or the unauthorised adaptation of the new services’.<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Bodkin of Tuam ‘retained the old liturgy, and used it even in the presence of the Lord Deputy’,<sup>9</sup> the Protestant Henry Sidney. According to a contemporary, in Bodkin’s cathedral at Tuam ‘mass is sung and said, and he himself is daily in the choir’.<sup>10</sup>

There are two possible interpretations of this state of affairs. On the one hand it has been argued that it was more than just political inertia, that ‘the more conservative form of Anglicanism introduced to Ireland initially may actually have been more in line with the Queen’s personal preference’,<sup>11</sup> and that the Ornaments Rubric had been included in the Elizabethan prayer book specifically to enable the Irish clergy to retain the use of the traditional eucharistic vestments.<sup>12</sup> Whether or not this was the case, it was certainly

<sup>7</sup> P. J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Dublin 1981, 24.

<sup>8</sup> S. G. Ellis, *Tudor Ireland: Crown, Community and the Conflict of Cultures 1470–1603*, London 1985, 213.

<sup>9</sup> A. Clarke, ‘Varieties of Uniformity: The First Century of the Church of Ireland’, *Studies in Church History*, xxv (1989), 110.

<sup>10</sup> Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 214.

<sup>11</sup> H. A. Jefferies, ‘The Irish Parliament of 1560: The Anglican Reforms Authorised’, *Irish Historical Studies*, xxvi (1988–9), 140.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

true that the permission given for the widespread use of the Latin version of the prayer book ensured that most Irish bishops were prepared to support the legislative measures by which the Elizabethan religious settlement was confirmed in Ireland in 1560.<sup>13</sup> A more likely explanation of the failure by the government to ensure a less conservative Reformation in many parts of Ireland was its recognition that, at a time when it did not have secure political control outside the Pale, the area adjacent to Dublin, any attempt to impose a more rigorous reform programme would have been either ignored or resisted. Within the Pale the situation was different and it is notable that in several of the Pale dioceses a concerted attempt was made to impose the Reformation through the appointment of committed Protestants to vacant dioceses: Hugh Brady to Meath in 1563, Robert Daly to Kildare in 1564, Christopher Gaffney to Ossory, and Daniel Kavanagh to Leighlin in 1567. In the last of these years another committed Protestant, Adam Loftus, archbishop of Armagh since 1563, was translated to Dublin to succeed the conservative Hugh Curwin, who had been translated to Oxford; Loftus was then succeeded at Armagh by another Protestant, Thomas Lancaster, who had been deprived as bishop of Kildare in Mary's reign.<sup>14</sup> At Meath, Hugh Brady (1563–84) made strenuous efforts to enforce the Reformation within his diocese but with relatively little success, hampered by the fact that in 1576 only eighteen of his clergy could speak English, the rest having, according to one contemporary 'very little Latin, less learning and civility... In many places the very walls of the churches [were] down, very few chancels covered, windows and doors ruined and spoiled.'<sup>15</sup> In fact fifty-two of the churches in the diocese were in repair in 1576, but thereafter the situation seems to have got worse rather than better, with the majority of the churches in the diocese described as 'utterly ruined' by the end of the century.<sup>16</sup> Very slow progress was made in producing texts in Irish; a catechism was published in 1571, but a New Testament, completed in 1587, was not published until 1603.<sup>17</sup> An Irish translation of the *Book of Common Prayer* followed in 1608. Surveying the situation in Ireland in the last decade of the sixteenth century, Alan Ford concludes that 'the Church of Ireland was still staffed by native clergy... only a few could preach, and even fewer had university degrees'. The services of the *Book of Common Prayer* were 'used and misused in careless fashion... sometimes... read in Latin, often... freely adapted to accommodate the time-honoured methods of

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 133, 137–9.

<sup>14</sup> Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 215.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>16</sup> H. C. Walshe, 'Enforcing the Elizabethan Settlement: The Vicissitudes of Hugh Brady, Bishop of Meath, 1563–84', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxvi (1988–9), 374–6.

<sup>17</sup> Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 218.

pre-Reformation worship with which people were familiar'.<sup>18</sup> Ford ascribes the decision of the Dublin government to attempt to rectify this situation, after a delay of thirty years, to the recognition that it was not simply dealing with 'Catholic Survivalism' in Ireland but that, as a result of the vacuum, an opportunity was being offered to a new generation of committed Irish Roman Catholics, trained as priests in continental seminaries, to move the Irish people from 'Catholic Survivalism' to the mainstream Roman Catholicism of the European Counter-Reformation. These seminary-educated priests had begun to appear in Ireland by 1580 and what they had to offer appeared much more attractive to most 'Conservative Conformists' than either a watered-down or even a more advanced type of Protestantism.<sup>19</sup> Both clergy and laity began to withdraw from the Church of Ireland leaving benefices vacant and with no candidates to fill them. In c.1592 Bishop Lyon of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross noted that the 226 parishes of his three dioceses were served by only 68 clergy, with 76 vacant benefices and the revenues of a further 22 alienated by laymen.<sup>20</sup> One solution to the religious problems of Ireland might have been to bring about a greater integration between the ecclesiastical establishments of England, Ireland, Wales, and (after the union of the English and Scottish crowns in 1603) Scotland. In practice this was never really attempted. The number of episcopal translations between Irish sees and those in England, Scotland, and Wales remained negligible,<sup>21</sup> though both English and Scottish clergy were appointed to both bishoprics and some of the wealthier ecclesiastical benefices in Ireland, and in the early years of the seventeenth century this was seen as the best method of securing the implementation of the 'second phase' of the Irish Reformation.

There were three main strands in the new religious policy of the Dublin government in the last decade of the sixteenth and the first quarter of the seventeenth centuries. The first was to secure a better, and more unequivocally Protestant, education for native Irish clergy. There had been attempts to establish a university in Ireland since the episcopate of George Browne, a moderate Protestant, as archbishop of Dublin (1536–54), but that had failed. However, as a result of an initiative by the corporation of Dublin, Trinity College was founded as a university for Ireland in 1591–2 though its initial impact was severely limited by its size. It began with a total establishment of three fellows and three scholars, though this gradually increased and the total number of scholars was fixed at seventy by the charter of 1637. Not all the early fellows were in holy orders and not all the early students entered the

<sup>18</sup> A. Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590–1641*, Frankfurt 1985, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 221–3.

<sup>20</sup> Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, 24.

<sup>21</sup> For details see Appendix 2.

ordained ministry of the Church of Ireland. The statutes of 1637 laid down that all the fellows except two (one to study law and the other to study medicine) were to be in holy orders. The dominant figure in the early years of the college was James Ussher, Professor of Divinity 1607–21 and Vice-Chancellor 1615–46.<sup>22</sup> Ussher became bishop of Meath in 1621 and was translated to the primatial see of Armagh in 1625. The limited initial impact of the college on the Irish Church can be seen in the fact that, more than twenty years after its foundation, in 1615 only twenty-three college graduates were serving the Church of Ireland. This number increased thereafter but the majority of graduates served parishes in the province of Dublin, leading to the description of the college as ‘not a national university, but as a Pale-based institution’.<sup>23</sup>

The second strand of the new religious policy was the use of English and Scottish clergy to provide ecclesiastical leadership in Ireland, a policy which was closely linked to that of plantation, whereby English and Scottish settlement was encouraged in those parts of Ireland in which the Dublin-based government had least influence. As part of this policy Irish dioceses which had been vacant for several years were at last filled by Protestant bishops: Kilmore in 1604; Clogher, Derry, and Raphoe in 1605; Kilfenora in 1606; Dromore in 1607; Waterford and Lismore in 1608. The majority of episcopal appointments in Ireland after 1600 went to English or Scottish clergymen. Whereas in 1603 ten out of the then sixteen bishops in office were Irish, by 1625 only three out of twenty-three bishops were Irish. It was also possible to attract English and Scottish clergy to serve in Ireland because there was a shortage of livings in England in the early seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup> In the united diocese of Killala and Achonry, where two Scottish bishops succeeded one another after the death of Miler Magrath in 1622, ‘the diocesan clergy were transformed from a wholly native body in 1615 to a largely Scottish ministry in 1634’.<sup>25</sup> Andrew Knox, translated from the Scottish diocese of the Isles to the Irish diocese of Raphoe in 1611 (though he retained the former see until 1618), used his experience ‘of reforming a wholly Gaelic diocese in the remote Scottish highlands’ as a model for the reform of his Irish diocese. Having inherited ‘no Conformist native ministers’ at Raphoe he appointed Scottish clergy to serve the vacant benefices. By 1622 the diocese had twenty settler and seven native clergy, two of the latter being ‘identified as converted [Roman Catholic] priests’. In several dioceses native clergy were discriminated against

<sup>22</sup> R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin 1592–1952: An Academic History*, Cambridge 1982, 2–3, 10–13.

<sup>23</sup> Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, 77–9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 33, 41, 73.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

with the richer benefices going to English or Scottish clergy.<sup>26</sup> This compares with the situation in the united diocese of Meath and Clonmacnois in 1604 in which ten of the thirty richest benefices were still held by Irish clergy.<sup>27</sup>

The one Irish bishop who took a different view was William Bedell. Bedell had moved from England to become provost of Trinity College, Dublin, in 1627. In 1629 he was consecrated as bishop of the united dioceses of Kilmore and Ardagh. He learned Irish and instituted an Irish lecture at the college and Irish prayers in the college chapel on holy days. As bishop he declined to replace native clergy by settlers and to follow the example of many of his fellow bishops in providing for the spiritual welfare of settler communities at the expense of indigenous ones. In many Irish dioceses it was noticeable that many of the churches out of repair were overwhelmingly in the Irish-speaking areas and that when churches had fallen into ruin they were frequently rebuilt nearer to the plantation settlements. Thus when Conwall parish church in County Donegal became ruinous Bishop Knox of Raphoe recommended that it should be rebuilt at Letterkenny, where there were eighty settler families.<sup>28</sup>

There is no doubt that, however unsatisfactory the policies of the new breed of bishops may have been from the point of view of native Irish clergy and laity, they certainly resulted in an overall improvement in the standards of pastoral provision within the Church of Ireland, and particularly in addressing one of the main concerns of Protestant bishops since the 1560s, the lack of preaching ministers. By 1615 out of 525 clergy in the Church of Ireland 161 were preaching ministers, though they remained comparatively few in some dioceses, Tuam only having 11. This figure had grown by 1622 from 161 to 244. Technically there were then 2,492 parishes in Ireland but in practice many parishes, some of which had neither churches nor parishioners willing to attend Protestant services, were formed into consolidated benefices, with the result that clerical incomes could be set at a level sufficient to attract the better-educated clergy. The surviving evidence, however, suggests that by the 1620s the improvement in the standards of pastoral provision had reached a level beyond which they could not improve much further. In the province of Armagh between 1622 and 1634 the total number of clergy increased from 167 to 227, but the number of those resident on their benefices decreased from 158 to 146, and the number of licensed preachers from 112 to 109. Figures for 16 Irish dioceses in 1615 and 1634 show that 36.8% of clergy were preaching ministers in the latter year compared with 28% in the former. The main improvement seems to have taken place in the second decade of the seventeenth century. In the diocese of Killaloe 7 clergy in 1611 had increased to 31,

<sup>26</sup> Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, 166–9.

<sup>27</sup> Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 223.

<sup>28</sup> Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, 140–1, 171–2.

of which 26 were resident but only 9 Irish, by 1615.<sup>29</sup> In addition to the improvement in the number of clergy and licensed preachers there was a similar improvement in the condition of church fabrics. Out of 1,512 churches in the provinces of Cashel, Dublin, and Tuam in 1615, 634 (42.8%) were then in good repair, though considerably fewer in Cashel (30.4%) than in Dublin (54.8%) or Tuam (56.3%). The diocese with the largest number of churches in good repair was Ferns (78%); at the other end of the scale fifteen out of eighteen churches were out of repair in the small west-coast diocese of Kilfenora and there was no information on the remaining three. However, as in the case of clergy and preacher numbers, these figures seem to have marked something of a peak. In 1622 the three dioceses of Kildare, Meath, and Ossory returned fewer churches as being in good repair than they had seven years earlier.<sup>30</sup>

The third strand of the new religious policy was the theological one. The deliberate attempt to make the Church of Ireland more Protestant was occurring at the same time that the Church of England was moving in the opposite direction.<sup>31</sup> Ireland therefore proved to be increasingly attractive to English and Scottish Calvinists who disliked the religious policies of James VI and I, and Calvinists became the dominant theological party in the Church of Ireland during the first three decades of the seventeenth century. Advanced Calvinism had infiltrated Trinity College, Dublin, even earlier with the appointment of Walter Travers as its first full-time provost in 1594. The college authorities were criticized by Archbishop Abbot of Canterbury for Puritan practices such as the encouragement of ‘lay preaching and failure to require the wearing of the surplice’.<sup>32</sup> The use of Scottish clergy within the Church of Ireland created further theological and liturgical complications. Scottish clergy were reluctant to use the *Book of Common Prayer* and, though they acted with episcopal authority, in effect they ‘created a Presbyterian church within the established one, retaining in Ireland the traditional Scottish approach to ordination, where the presbytery would join with the bishop in the laying on of hands’. Several Irish bishops, including both Knox of Raphoe and Archbishop Ussher, were sympathetic to these Presbyterian tendencies within the ministry of the Church of Ireland, and the Irish Articles of 1615 were considerably more Calvinist in tone than the Thirty-Nine Articles of the

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–6, 71, 84, 87, 131–3; Clarke, ‘Varieties of Uniformity’, 118.

<sup>30</sup> Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, 113–14.

<sup>31</sup> See especially the pioneering study by N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c.1590–1640*, Oxford 1987, and J. Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England*, Cambridge 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, 199, and ‘The Church of Ireland, 1558–1634: A Puritan Church?’, in *As By Law Established: The Church of Ireland since the Reformation*, ed. A. Ford, J. McGuire, and K. Milne, Dublin 1995, 59.

Church of England.<sup>33</sup> However, the prevailing Calvinism of the Church of Ireland was checked following the appointment of Thomas Wentworth, one of Charles I's most trusted ministers, as Lord Deputy, in 1633, and the consecration of the Laudian high churchmen, John Bramhall, as bishop of Derry in 1634. Together they 'set out to bring the divergent Irish Church into conformity by securing the adoption of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the English Canons of 1604, and, having done so, to make that conformity uniform'.<sup>34</sup>

By that time, however, much damage had been done. The government and its Protestant lobby in Ireland had faced an acute dilemma thirty years earlier: 'in order to convert the native Irish, it needed native ministers; but the supply of native ministers was meagre because the native Irish were unconverted'.<sup>35</sup> The alternative strategy of importing Protestant clergy from England and Scotland turned out to be, in some respects, counter-productive. The attempt to Protestantize dioceses, in which bishops had previously pursued either a deeply conservative or, if more Protestant in outlook, a gradualist policy towards ecclesiastical reform, alienated the bulk of 'church papist' clergy and laity. Whereas previously they had been able to 'conform to the established church whilst at the same time continuing to worship... in the traditional, pre-Reformation manner', they were now forced to choose between the new Counter-Reformation Roman Catholicism of seminary-educated missionary priests or full-blown Protestantism of an ultra-Calvinist variety. When Bishop Downham of Derry (1617–34) told a Roman Catholic in his diocese that 'your religion of popery is superstitious and idolatrous, your faith erroneous and heretical, your church in respect of both apostatical, your deified Pope the head of that Catholic apostasy, and consequently Anti-christ'<sup>36</sup> it was clear that the days of 'church papism' were well and truly over. Although there were a few 'conservative conformists' who became 'enthusiastic Protestants', especially in Dublin and, perhaps more surprisingly, Galway, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the majority opted for 'recusancy'. In Ireland as a whole, 'the battle for religious allegiance was already lost at a very early stage of the new Catholic mission'. Even in Dublin by 1630 there were 'sizeable Protestant congregations only in a few city parishes in the neighbourhood of the castle. Elsewhere there is the same monotonous story—even where a service can be maintained the congregation is at best a handful, and in many parishes all the people are recusants and

<sup>33</sup> Ford, 'A Puritan Church', 64–6; P. Kilroy, *Protestant Dissent and Controversy in Ireland 1660–1714*, Cork 1994, 3–7.

<sup>34</sup> Clarke, 'Varieties of Uniformity', 120.

<sup>35</sup> Ford, *Protestant Reformation*, 107.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

there is no service.’ The numbers of secessions from the Church of Ireland were so considerable that in many dioceses ‘substantial progress had been made in setting up a [Roman Catholic] parish system by the end of the 1630s.’<sup>37</sup> In the diocese of Tuam the number of Roman Catholic parish clergy increased from thirty-four to fifty-seven between 1630 and 1637, and in that of Elphin the increase was from thirteen to forty-two between 1625 and 1637.<sup>38</sup> This happened despite a deliberate policy of persecution of Roman Catholics during the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

The strength of Irish Roman Catholicism by the 1630s was also shown in the extent to which it was possible to increase the number of bishops and to introduce a reformist Counter-Reformation agenda into diocesan administration. By 1643 no fewer than nineteen of the thirty dioceses had been provided with bishops. The decrees of the Tuam provincial synod, approved by Rome in 1634, insisted on the enforcement of strict post-Tridentine discipline, including regulations in respect of clerical dress, the keeping of registers, admissions to holy orders, the solemnization of marriages, the hearing of confessions and the reception of Holy Communion.<sup>39</sup> After the Irish rebellion of 1641 large parts of Ireland came under the control of the Confederation of Catholics of Ireland, established at a meeting at Kilkenny in 1642. Two years later the papacy appointed a nuncio to the Confederation, Giovanni Battista Rinuccini, Archbishop of the Italian diocese of Fermo. Although his mission was to end eventually in disaster, he secured the appointment of bishops to all but four of the remaining vacant Irish dioceses and endeavoured, despite resistance from the more conservative Irish bishops, to introduce the full splendour of Roman Catholic ceremonial into some Irish services, personally washing the feet of the poor on Maundy Thursday at Kilkenny in 1646 and Wexford in 1647.<sup>40</sup> This Roman Catholic revival was, temporarily at least, cut short by Cromwell’s invasion of Ireland in 1649, and a programme of ruthless repression by his lieutenants, but in the longer term its significance should not be under-estimated.

By allowing an extreme form of Calvinism to take root in the Church of Ireland in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the government and the more Protestant bishops had not just ensured the success of the Counter-Reformation missionaries and the building up of a Roman Catholic diocesan and parochial system in Ireland. They had also contributed to the further division of Protestantism in Ireland. As the anti-Calvinist measures of

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 27; Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, 222; Corish, *Catholic Community*, 28–9.

<sup>38</sup> T. Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Reformation in Ireland: The Mission of Rinuccini 1645–1649*, Oxford 2002, 58.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

Wentworth and Bramhall began to be effective, Scottish Presbyterian ministers left Ireland and by 1637, the majority had departed. The anti-Calvinist victory was, however, short-lived. With the collapse of Charles I's personal rule in 1640, and the descent into civil war, most of Bramhall's work was undone. Although bishops continued to be appointed to Irish sees somewhat later than in England, the last consecration being that of Edward Parry to Killaloe in 1647, Bramhall himself and several other high churchmen in Ireland, including Archbishop Hamilton of Cashel (a Scottish high churchman), Bishop Leslie of Down and Connor, and Dean King of Tuam, went into exile on the European mainland during the 1650s. Presbyterian ministers returned to Ireland, reappearing with the Scottish Army in 1642 when a formal presbytery was established at Carrickfergus. By 1653 there were twenty-four Presbyterian ministers in Ireland and further presbyteries were established in North Antrim in 1654, Laggan (Donegal) in 1657, and Tyrone in 1659. Each presbytery was divided into parishes as they were in Scotland.<sup>41</sup>

As well as the reintroduction of Presbyterianism into Ireland, the upheavals of the 1640s also saw the introduction of Independency with the Cromwellian Army. Two Independent congregations had been established in Dublin parish churches in 1651, and in 1652 the minister of one of these congregations, Samuel Winter, was appointed provost of Trinity College. Whereas Presbyterianism remained a powerful force in parts of Ireland after the restoration of Charles II in 1660 and the Irish episcopate in 1661, other types of non-episcopal Protestantism made little long-term impact. Winter was ejected from his provostship in 1660, and his incumbency of St Nicholas-within-the Walls in 1661, but he continued to minister to an Independent congregation in Dublin. By 1695 there were also Independent congregations in Carlow, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary, and Wexford, but their numbers remained so small that the Irish bishops, who were much more concerned about the serious challenge from Presbyterianism, made no attempt to suppress them.

There was also some Quaker activity in Ireland from the 1650s, and Quakers disrupted both Church of Ireland and Roman Catholic services in the 1660s and 1670s. There were thirty Quaker meetings in Ireland by 1660 and fifty-three by 1701. In 1680 there were 798 Quaker families in Ireland which has been taken to indicate a total Quaker population of between 5,500 and 6,500.<sup>42</sup> Commenting on the religious situation in Ireland, one historian of religion in that country has concluded that 'the consequence of the failure

<sup>41</sup> Kilroy, *Protestant Dissent*, 16; J. McCafferty, 'John Bramhall and the Church of Ireland in the 1630s', in *As By Law Established*, 110; R. S. Boshier, *The Making of the Restoration Settlement: The Influence of the Laudians 1649–1662*, London 1951, 284–94; R. Gillespie, 'The Presbyterian Revolution in Ulster, 1660–1690', *Studies in Church History*, xxv (1989), 159.

<sup>42</sup> Kilroy, *Protestant Dissent*, 60, 63, 68, 75, 82, 86–7, 90.

to take over Catholicism was the failure to contain Protestantism. By the standards of those who instituted it, the Church of Ireland failed, not once, but twice.<sup>43</sup> It is a harsh judgement but one with which it is difficult to disagree.

#### THE CONSOLIDATION OF RELIGIOUS DIVISION 1660–1715

The restoration of Charles II in 1660 led to a new religious settlement. In theory this settlement could have been different in the constituent parts of the British Isles, but it would have caused practical difficulties. What was achieved was a restoration of episcopacy throughout the British Isles, but with the concession in Scotland that episcopacy would work in tandem with presbyteries and kirk sessions, and that no attempt would be made to impose an Anglican liturgy on the Scottish Church. The religious settlement in Ireland followed the pattern in England and Wales rather than that in Scotland, with the result that Irish Presbyterians had to make a conscious choice as to whether they would accept the settlement or become dissenters. Of the seventy-five to eighty Presbyterian ministers in Ireland in 1662 only about a tenth conformed to the establishment, the rest being ejected from the benefices to which they had been appointed during the interregnum, but in most cases remaining in the parishes to which they had formerly ministered and holding meetings for worship in private houses. In many cases the majority of parishioners, especially in Ulster parishes, chose to worship with their former minister rather than accept the ministrations of the Church of Ireland incumbent appointed to succeed him.<sup>44</sup>

The first action that had to be taken to re-establish the Church of Ireland was the filling of those dioceses which had fallen vacant through the deaths of bishops during the interregnum. Whereas in the other parts of the British Isles there was a concerted attempt to maintain a balance in the appointment of bishops so as to make the post-restoration establishment as comprehensive as possible, the majority of bishops appointed to Irish sees in 1661 were strong high churchmen. They included three existing bishops translated to more senior sees: John Bramhall of Derry to the archbishopric of Armagh, Thomas Fulwar of Ardfert to the archbishopric of Cashel, and Henry Leslie of Down and Connor to the bishopric of Meath. Eleven of the fifteen new bishops had been 'sufferers' during the interregnum, including the distinguished high

<sup>43</sup> Clarke, 'Varieties of Uniformity', 122.

<sup>44</sup> R. F. G. Holmes, *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, Blackrock 2000, 40–1.

church theologian, Jeremy Taylor, appointed to the dioceses of Down, Connor, and Dromore. The only bishops who could be described as ‘moderates’ were Edward Worth, newly appointed to Killaloe, and Henry Jones, translated from Clogher to Meath after the premature death of Henry Leslie in 1661. That the Irish appointments should have been so partisan is in a way surprising since the move to re-establish episcopacy in Ireland had been supported by two of the leading Irish Puritans, Sir Charles Coote and Roger Boyle, Lord Broghill, and bearing in mind that the Presbyterian lobby in Ireland was a good deal stronger than it was in England or Wales.<sup>45</sup> The high church leadership of the Church of Ireland from 1661 was a major factor affecting its development over the succeeding century.<sup>46</sup> The strong sacramental tradition within the Church of Ireland, apparent in the late seventeenth century,<sup>47</sup> survived into the early nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup> The Church of Ireland was not seriously affected by the non-juring schism that temporarily divided high churchmen in England and Wales in the 1690s, and led to the abolition of episcopacy in Scotland, with only one Irish bishop, William Sheridan of Kilmore, being deprived in 1691 for refusing to take the oath to William III and Mary II. Measures were also taken by the post-restoration Church of Ireland for the better education of the clergy and to encourage them to learn Irish. There was a major expansion of Trinity College, Dublin, where the annual number of matriculations increased from thirty-five in 1665 to fifty by 1674 and to sixty-five by 1683. The character of the post-restoration episcopate also finally ended the college’s former puritan tradition. Several new buildings, including a new chapel, were erected in the late seventeenth century. Both Archbishops Marsh (1694–1703) and King (1703–29) of Dublin encouraged the students to study Irish and the latter endowed a lectureship in divinity in 1718, the stipend of which was further augmented by a bequest in his will.<sup>49</sup> By the 1740s, in some parts of Ireland such as the dioceses of Ossory and Raphoe, 90% of the Church of Ireland clergy were graduates of Trinity College, Dublin.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> I. M. Green, *The Re-Establishment of the Church of England 1660–1663*, Oxford 1978, 18, 32; J. McGuire, ‘Policy and Patronage: The Appointment of Bishops 1660–61’, in *As By Law Established*, 112–13, 116–17.

<sup>46</sup> See especially F. R. Bolton, *The Caroline Tradition of the Church of Ireland*, London 1958.

<sup>47</sup> R. Gillespie, ‘The Religion of Irish Protestants: A View from the Laity, 1580–1700’, in *As By Law Established*, 93.

<sup>48</sup> Bolton, *Caroline Tradition*, 171–82.

<sup>49</sup> McDowell and Webb, *Trinity College*, 22–4, 44; E. M. Johnston, ‘Problems Common to both Protestant and Catholic Churches in Eighteenth Century Ireland’, in *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750–1950*, ed. O. MacDonagh, W. F. Mandle, and P. Travers, London 1983, 20–1.

<sup>50</sup> T. Barnard, *A New Anatomy of Ireland: The Irish Protestants, 1649–1770*, New Haven and London 2003, 82.

Presbyterianism in Ireland was not significantly weakened by the religious settlement of 1660–1. Indeed in Ulster the weakness of the Church of Ireland and continued immigration from Scotland greatly strengthened the Presbyterian community. The existence of established congregations was grudgingly accepted by the Church of Ireland bishops, who concentrated their efforts on trying to prevent the establishment of new congregations or the building of meeting houses. There was, however, a serious shortage of available ministers and, as a result, some kirk sessions collapsed since they were obliged to have a minister for the session to meet and for the sacrament of Holy Communion to be administered. The Irish presbyteries established a General Committee to agree important matters of doctrine and practice and this developed into the Synod of Ulster in 1690.<sup>51</sup> The Presbyterian increase in Ulster was most spectacular in the growing urban community of Belfast where it grew from 30 to 70% of the population between 1660 and 1705. Outside Ulster, where Presbyterianism was almost wholly the result of Scottish immigration, the survival of Presbyterianism was rather different and consisted of English Presbyterian clergy and laity who refused to accept the restoration of episcopacy. There were three such congregations in Dublin and a total of seventeen in Ireland altogether organized into the five presbyteries of Dublin, Athlone, Drogheda, Galway, and Munster. Unlike the Scottish Presbyterians in Ulster they did not increase in number.<sup>52</sup>

The religious settlement of 1660–1 was essentially a settlement involving the claims of rival groups of Protestants. The majority religion of Ireland, Roman Catholicism, was simply ignored. After the severe religious persecution of the interregnum, the Roman Catholic ‘parish system was in great disarray and diocesan structure scarcely existed’. Only two Roman Catholic bishops were resident in Ireland. Bishops were appointed for some dioceses, and vicars-general for others, from 1669, but it was not until 1730 that ‘almost every diocese had its bishop, in some cases after a very long vacancy’.<sup>53</sup> The accession of the Roman Catholic Duke of York as James II in 1685 offered the Irish Roman Catholic community the hope that their conditions would be improved, though even during the reign of Charles II Roman Catholics had been ‘able to function more freely than...for over a century’,<sup>54</sup> and the building of mass houses had been widely tolerated by Church of Ireland bishops and clergy ‘tacitly abandoning a missionary role’.<sup>55</sup> In 1686 the

<sup>51</sup> R. L. Greaves, ‘The Church of Ireland and the Nonconformist Challenge, 1660–88’, in *As By Law Established*, 126, 132; Gillespie, ‘Presbyterian Revolution’, 166–8.

<sup>52</sup> Kilroy, *Protestant Dissent*, 26, 40–2, 52.

<sup>53</sup> Corish, *Catholic Community*, 49, 56–7, 78.

<sup>54</sup> J. G. Simms, *Jacobite Ireland 1685–91*, London 1969, 8–9.

<sup>55</sup> Corish, *Catholic Community*, 58.

Roman Catholic bishops received permission to wear episcopal dress, but not their pectoral crosses, in public, and twelve of them received modest payments of between £150 and £300. In return they agreed to rebuke their parishioners who refused to pay tithes to the Church of Ireland clergy. The chapels at Dublin Castle and Kilmainham Hospital were adapted for Roman Catholic worship.

Although James II, even after his enforced exile from England in 1688, made no attempt to dismantle the Anglican establishment in Ireland, some churches in Dublin, including the two cathedrals, were forcibly occupied by Roman Catholics for short periods in 1689–90, and at Wexford the altar and pews in the parish church were broken by Roman Catholics who had seized the building from its Church of Ireland congregation.<sup>56</sup> Although there was support from the Roman Catholic community, and even some high church Anglicans, for James II in Ireland, his attempt to retain his kingship there finally became impossible after the defeat of the Jacobite forces at the Battle of the Boyne in July 1690, and James's own return to the safety of exile in France.

Irish Presbyterians were hopeful that, after the decision to abolish episcopacy in Scotland, the new regime of William III and Mary II might take similar steps in Ireland. This hope was effectively dashed by the decision of all but one of the Irish bishops to accept political reality and acknowledge the new regime, which was therefore deprived of the justification it might otherwise have had, as it had in Scotland, to abolish episcopacy in Ireland as well. The government's inclination was to be as tolerant as it could be of Presbyterianism in Ireland but the attitude of the Church of Ireland bishops was quite the opposite, so much so that they gave the impression that they were more sympathetic to Roman Catholicism than they were to Presbyterianism. What the Presbyterians did achieve was freedom of worship, but with political restrictions, since they were obliged to receive the sacrament in the Church of Ireland, and produce a certificate confirming this, if they wished to take up public office. Their ministers also received an increase in the *regium donum*, a small sum of money which had been paid irregularly since 1672 towards the support of Presbyterian ministers in Ireland in return for their political loyalty.

The opposition to Presbyterianism in Ireland was led by William King, bishop of Derry from 1691 and archbishop of Dublin from 1703. In 1686 King, then chancellor of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, had been involved in a pamphlet war with the English Presbyterian minister in Dublin, Joseph Boyse, following the conversion of Peter Manby, dean of Derry, to Roman Catholicism in that year. King accused the Presbyterians of creating divisions

<sup>56</sup> Simms, *Jacobite Ireland*, 27, 42, 86, 88.

among Protestants in Ireland that played into the hands of the Roman Catholics. Boyse accused the Church of Ireland of crypto-papism for bowing to the altar, using the sign of the cross, kneeling for communion, claiming to absolve sins, wearing surplices, and allowing organs in their churches. King continued his anti-Presbyterian stance as bishop of Derry but indicated his willingness to incorporate Presbyterians into the Protestant establishment if they would accept a measure of liturgical reform, such as kneeling, more frequent communion, and the use of the Lord's Prayer and more scripture readings in their services. In Ulster most Presbyterians celebrated communion only once or twice a year, on the Scottish pattern, though in Dublin Boyse had monthly communion. Boyse agreed that union was possible but only if the Church of Ireland was prepared to retain presbyteries and kirk sessions, as the post-restoration Scottish Church had done, to provide better training for its clergy and to abolish pluralism and non-residence. There was clearly no meeting of minds. Relations between the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterians were to remain bad for the whole of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1712 the members of the Irish Convocation requested that payment of the *regium donum* be discontinued as they suspected it was being used to finance new Presbyterian congregations in Ireland. It was in fact suspended in 1714 but renewed in 1715 when it was increased to £2,000 per annum. What the Church of Ireland would have liked to have obtained from the British government was a 'policy of religious exclusiveness' in its favour, but it was a policy with which the government was in genuine agreement for only a very short period in the reign of Queen Anne when it was dominated by Tory high churchmen.<sup>57</sup> The Church of Ireland did not, however, just see its relationship to Presbyterianism as being the agent of religious repression. King, particularly as bishop of Derry, launched a diocesan reform programme, including the extensive repair of existing, and building of new, churches, in an effort to persuade Presbyterians to conform to the Church of Ireland, as he himself, the son of an immigrant Scottish miller, had done in 1670.<sup>58</sup>

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the position of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland was, despite its strength among the population in terms of religious allegiance, still very weak. In 1703 there were only three

<sup>57</sup> Kilroy, *Protestant Dissent*, 172–3, 175–8, 180–93, 233, 252, 258; E. M. Johnston, *Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, Dublin 1974, 19, 32. See also J. C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687–1780*, London 1948, 20–70; P. O'Regan, *Archbishop William King of Dublin (1650–1729) and The Constitution in Church and State*, Dublin 2000, 68–9, 73–8, 179–80, 248–61; and R. Gillespie, 'Irish Print and Protestant Identity: William King's Pamphlet Wars, 1687–1697', in *Taking Sides? Colonial and Confessional Mentalities in Early Modern Ireland: Essays in Honour of Karl S. Bottigheimer*, ed. V. P. Carey and U. Lotz Heumann, Dublin 2003, 231–50.

<sup>58</sup> Gillespie, 'Irish Print and Protestant Identity', 60–3, 72–3, 126–31.

bishops resident in Ireland, though a number of new episcopal appointments were made from 1707. The church was suspected of continued Jacobitism, not assisted by the fact that Roman Catholic bishops were provided to Irish sees by the papacy on the nomination of James II's *de jure* heir, James III, the 'Old Pretender'. This arrangement ceased only shortly before the pretender's death in 1766 when the papacy declined to accept the claims of his son, Charles III, the 'Young Pretender', to the British throne. An attempt to restrict Roman Catholic activity in Ireland was made by an act of 1704 which obliged Roman Catholic priests to register if they wished to continue their ministry in Ireland. A total of 1,089 priests registered: 352 in Leinster, 289 in Munster, 259 in Connaught, and 189 in Ulster. The figures show how Roman Catholic support was spread fairly evenly throughout Ireland, though weakest in Ulster, whereas Protestants were concentrated in relatively small areas of the country, especially Ulster and the area around Dublin. Bishops resident in Ireland registered as parish priests. Once a priest had registered he 'was free to carry out his normal duties... So long as the priest was registered, Catholic churches could be, and were, openly resorted to by their congregations.' The registration measure, however, made no provision for future clergy to register and it was devised in the hope that 'within a limited number of years the Catholic Church in Ireland, deprived of its clergy, would gradually fade away'.<sup>59</sup>

#### THE RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHY OF IRELAND

By the first quarter of the eighteenth century the religious geography of Ireland had been established by the developments of the previous century, and it has not been significantly altered between then and the present day, despite the enormous economic, political, and social developments of the intervening three centuries. Both Roman Catholics and Presbyterians were politically restricted, the latter by the imposition of the sacramental test, the former by specific legislation. Roman Catholics could not sit in Parliament, nor could they vote in parliamentary elections between 1728 and 1793: they were also excluded from municipal corporations, the magistracy, the legal profession, parish vestries, and from acting as sheriffs or constables. Their ability to hold land was also severely restricted. The desire to retain their estates and not to be excluded from political life encouraged a substantial

<sup>59</sup> *A New History of Ireland IV: Eighteenth Century Ireland 1691–1800*, ed. T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan, Oxford 1986, 91, 93; Johnston, *Ireland*, 40.

number of Roman Catholic landowners, and others aspiring to social advancement, to conform to the Church of Ireland.<sup>60</sup> In 1728 Archbishop Boulter of Armagh noted that in Ireland ‘the practice of the law from top to bottom is at present mostly in the hands of the new converts’.<sup>61</sup> Even the Presbyterian community in Ireland contained very few landowners, though it included significant numbers of tenant farmers and merchants.<sup>62</sup> The hearth tax returns for 1732–3 suggested that at that date 73% of the population of Ireland was Roman Catholic, though Sean Connolly thinks that this is probably an under-estimate and that possibly up to 79% of the population was Roman Catholic. Protestants were most numerous in the towns and weakest in the countryside. Connolly estimates that the provincial totals for Roman Catholics ranged from 38% in Ulster to 79% in Leinster, 89% in Munster and 91% in Connaught. In the last two provinces Roman Catholics formed more than four-fifths of the population in every county, though reduced to 68% in the largest urban centre, the city of Cork. In Leinster the Roman Catholic population was below four-fifths of the population in only two counties, Dublin and Wicklow, and was down to 32% in the city of Dublin. On the other hand, in the nine counties of Ulster, Roman Catholics only outnumbered Protestants in Cavan (76%), Monaghan (64%), and Tyrone (52%). In three other counties they were less than a third of the population: Down (27%), Londonderry (24%), and Antrim (19%). At the same date the Protestant minority was almost evenly divided between the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian churches, with the former representing just over, and the latter just under, one-tenth of the total population of Ireland as a whole.<sup>63</sup> These rough and ready calculations are not significantly different from the more scientific calculations of the mid-nineteenth century,<sup>64</sup> or those of the official census of 1861 in which Roman Catholics formed 78% of the population, members of the Church of Ireland 12% and Presbyterians 9%. Other religious bodies formed less than 1% of the population at that date.<sup>65</sup>

The most striking evidence from any analysis of the religious statistics for Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is the weakness of the Church of Ireland. It was not the largest single denomination in any of the Irish dioceses and only attracted the support of more than a quarter of the population in the diocese of Clogher, more than a fifth in three other

<sup>60</sup> Moody and Vaughan, *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 37–8.

<sup>61</sup> Johnston, *Ireland*, 26.

<sup>62</sup> Moody and Vaughan, *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 40.

<sup>63</sup> S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660–1760*, Oxford 1992, 144–6.

<sup>64</sup> For details see Appendix 3.

<sup>65</sup> P. M. H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales*, London 1969, 40–1.

dioceses—Armagh, Dromore, and Dublin—and more than a tenth in a further six: Derry, Down and Connor, Ferns and Leighlin, Kildare, Kilmore, and Raphoe. In the last of these dioceses the number of adherents of the three main religious groups in Ireland, membership of any others being so small by the mid-eighteenth century as to be irrelevant in political or social terms, more or less replicated the proportions across Ireland as a whole, the only Irish diocese where this was the case. In more than half the dioceses of the Church of Ireland the level of support for the established church was derisory, and by the early nineteenth century there were stated to be forty-one parishes in Ireland in which the established church had no adherents at all.<sup>66</sup> The strength of the Church of Ireland, if such a word can be used about such a weak religious body, lay entirely in Ulster and the Pale. Roman Catholics were the largest religious group in every Irish diocese except Down and Connor, and even there they numbered more than a quarter of the population. Although they were the largest group in the diocese of Dromore, they were outnumbered there by the combined forces of the Church of Ireland and Presbyterians, and they formed only a bare majority of the population in the diocese of Derry. Everywhere else in Ireland Roman Catholics formed at least 60% of the population, and the figure was over 90% in all the west coast dioceses except Raphoe. Presbyterian strength in Ireland was heavily concentrated in five of the Ulster dioceses: Presbyterians formed an outright majority in Down and Connor, a third of the population in Derry and Dromore, and more than a tenth of the population in Armagh and Raphoe. However, the total for dioceses can be misleading. Those for Dromore, as Table 1.1 shows, disguised significant variations of Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic strengths and weaknesses in the thirty-one parishes of this small diocese.

There were also significant numbers of Presbyterians in the Ulster dioceses of Clogher and Kilmore but everywhere else in Ireland their numbers were exceptionally small, less than one-thousandth of the population in the dioceses of Cashel and Emly, Clonfert and Kilmacduagh, Cloyne, Kildare, Killaloe and Kilfenora, Limerick and Ardfert, and Ossory. The Church of Ireland had to defend itself on two religious fronts at the same time: throughout Ireland against Roman Catholicism, which outnumbered it in every diocese, in many cases by a massive amount, and in Ulster against Presbyterianism, which was also stronger than the Church of Ireland in the dioceses of Derry, Down and Connor, and Dromore. There was no weaker established church, Catholic or Protestant, in the whole of Europe.

<sup>66</sup> W. Shee, *The Irish Church*, London and Dublin 1852, 210.

Table 1.1. Members of the Church of Ireland, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics in the parishes of the diocese of Dromore 1834

| Parish         | Church of Ireland (%) | Presbyterian (%) | Roman Catholic (%) |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Aghaderg       | 14.8                  | 42.4             | 42.8               |
| Aghalee        | 54.7                  | 2.0              | 43.3               |
| Annaclone      | 5.6                   | 45.8             | 48.6               |
| Annahilt       | 21.4                  | 73.4             | 5.2                |
| Clonallon      | 5.3                   | 6.4              | 88.3               |
| Clonduff       | 5.8                   | 23.5             | 70.7               |
| Donaghcloney   | 49.6                  | 31.9             | 18.5               |
| Donaghmore     | 7.8                   | 44.0             | 48.2               |
| Dromara        | 10.8                  | 53.1             | 36.1               |
| Dromore        | 25.4                  | 60.1             | 14.5               |
| Drumballyroney | 7.6                   | 69.5             | 22.9               |
| Drumgath       | 7.4                   | 39.3             | 53.3               |
| Drumgooland    | 10.6                  | 30.9             | 58.5               |
| Garvaghy       | 20.1                  | 41.4             | 38.5               |
| Kilbroney      | 14.8                  | 4.4              | 80.8               |
| Kilcoo         | 15.1                  | 10.8             | 74.1               |
| Kilkeel        | 11.9                  | 28.3             | 59.8               |
| Kilmegan       | 23.0                  | 18.1             | 58.9               |
| Maghera        | 32.1                  | 11.3             | 56.6               |
| Magheradrool   | 19.5                  | 51.9             | 28.6               |
| Magherahamlet  | 10.8                  | 49.6             | 39.6               |
| Magheralin     | 52.8                  | 20.8             | 26.4               |
| Magherally     | 15.4                  | 75.1             | 9.5                |
| Moirá          | 54.3                  | 17.9             | 27.8               |
| Moyntaghs      | 33.2                  | 63.3             | 3.5                |
| Newry          | 12.5                  | 28.8             | 58.7               |
| Seagoe         | 62.6                  | 7.2              | 30.2               |
| Seapattrick    | 18.7                  | 62.6             | 18.7               |
| Shankhill      | 43.2                  | 22.5             | 34.3               |
| Tullylish      | 36.4                  | 33.5             | 30.1               |
| Warrenpoint    | 35.2                  | 19.3             | 45.5               |

Source: E. D. Atkinson, *Dromore: An Ulster Diocese*, Dundalk 1925, 159–311.

### MINORITY ESTABLISHMENT AND MAJORITY DISSENT 1715–70

The weakness of the Church of Ireland did not, however, mean that it was particularly ineffective within its own community. Many of the disparaging remarks about the Church of Ireland were made by English visitors who did not take into account that the role of the established church in Ireland, and in particular the level of support it enjoyed among the population as a whole, was very different from what it was like in England, or even in Wales, where

the established church still enjoyed the support of the bulk of the population. English visitors saw the ruined churches and were depressed by them. What they failed to appreciate was that these churches were a relic of a previous religious dispensation which was no longer relevant. The 800 clergy of the Church of Ireland may have been too few for a population of 2.5 million, but they were entirely sufficient for the 0.25 million who actually attended the services of the established church, and the number of churches in repair sufficient for those who wanted to worship in them. Pluralism was the inevitable result of poor endowments and small populations. Clergy holding eight or ten parishes in a united benefice might still only have an income of less than forty pounds, and the rationalization of parochial units does not seem to have deprived the Church of Ireland population of either religious services or satisfactory levels of pastoral care. The reform programme undertaken by Archbishop King of Dublin, and many of his episcopal colleagues, in the early eighteenth century was maintained in succeeding years and, in general terms, the Church of Ireland seems to have been as spiritually healthy in the 1750s and 1760s as the Church of England.<sup>67</sup> During the period between 1715 and 1770 the balance of appointments to Irish bishoprics tended to favour English over Irish appointees, but it is doubtful whether this had any negative impact on the efficiency of diocesan administration even if it did create tensions within the native Irish clergy who saw the opportunities for promotion becoming more limited. The number of non-Irish episcopal appointees must, however, never be exaggerated. In 1760, for example, the twenty-two archbishops and bishops then in office were 'divided equally between locals and strangers'.<sup>68</sup> Several archbishops and bishops of the early and mid-eighteenth century Church of Ireland were competent diocesans and some were distinguished scholars. Edward Synge of Tuam (1716–41) relinquished the episcopal share of the parish tithes in his diocese to benefit the parochial clergy. John Stearne of Clogher (1717–45) financed the completion of a new cathedral and was noted for his vigorous examination of candidates for holy orders. The distinguished philosopher, George Berkeley of Cloyne (1735–53), resided constantly in his diocese and provided leadership to his clergy in dealing with the effects of famine and disease in 1740–1.<sup>69</sup>

The one area in which there was a significant problem in Ireland was in the provision of episcopal residences and glebe houses for the parish clergy. Some bishops had no official residence and had to purchase one, and many clergy were obliged to buy or rent their own living accommodation, either because their parishes had no glebe houses or because they were not fit to live in. Some

<sup>67</sup> Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 178–83, 189–90.

<sup>68</sup> Barnard, *Anatomy*, 98.

<sup>69</sup> A. R. Acheson, *A History of the Church of Ireland 1691–1996*, Blackrock 1997, 81–2.

bishops were put off extended residence in the more remote Irish dioceses by the lack of basic facilities, such as the availability of physicians, apothecaries, or even glaziers. Bishops generally resided in their diocese during the summer months, spending the winter in Dublin, London, or Bath.<sup>70</sup>

The main development in Irish Presbyterianism in the eighteenth century was the situation which led to the separation of some ministers and congregations within the Synod of Ulster to set up the presbytery of Antrim in 1726. A high proportion of Irish Presbyterian ministers were educated in Scotland, with 36% of them between 1730 and 1760 holding degrees from one of the Scottish universities, and as a result the theological divisions among Presbyterians in Scotland were exported to Ireland. There were approximately 130 ministers in the Synod of Ulster in 1709. Those who broke away from the Synod of Ulster to form the presbytery of Antrim in 1726 did so because they had been influenced by liberals and rationalists in the Church of Scotland into believing ‘that every man should be guided by the light of his own conscience’, and therefore did not wish to subscribe to a rigid interpretation of the Westminster Confession. Later schisms were produced by a desire for an even stricter interpretation of Presbyterian doctrine and led to the setting up of the first reformed presbytery in Ireland in 1763.

By the end of the eighteenth century Irish Presbyterians were split into four main groups. The liberal or ‘new light’ group in the presbytery of Antrim; the ‘middle of the way’ group in the Synod of Ulster; and two groups of strict Calvinists, split as in Scotland into Burghers and Anti-Burghers. In 1799 there were 183 congregations in the Synod of Ulster and presbytery of Antrim, 58 Burgher and 25 Anti-Burgher congregations. In addition, there were some independent congregations of English origin in the south of Ireland and some independent ‘reformed’ congregations in Ulster. In North Donegal, for example, a secessionist congregation was formed in Ray in 1747 when its minister was forcibly removed to Belfast and the congregation refused to permit any minister or licentiate of the Synod of Ulster to preach there. The congregation was supplied by ministers and licentiates of the Anti-Burgher Presbytery of Glasgow. The secessionists retained possession of the meeting house for several years and, when they were finally evicted, built a new one almost adjacent. By 1846 the secessionist congregation retained the loyalty of 400 families compared with the 165 who worshipped in the original meeting house. Subsequent secessionist congregations were formed at Carnone in 1755 and Crossroads in 1781.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> T. Barnard, ‘Improving Clergymen, 1660–1760’, *As By Law Established*, 142–3.

<sup>71</sup> A. G. Lecky, *The Laggan Presbytery Books*, ed. W. Hanna, St Johnston 1978, 44–7. Note that the Synod of Ulster, subsequently General Assembly, congregation at Ray was served by three generations of the same family between 1791 and 1881, James Rentoul, his son Alexander, and

It was estimated that all the Presbyterian congregations in Ireland had a total of some 280 ministers at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>72</sup> Relations between the different groups of Presbyterians in Ireland were frequently unfriendly. Of 107 publications by Presbyterian ministers in Ireland between 1731 and 1775 no fewer than 49 were related to internal disputes within the Presbyterian churches. Attempts were made by the British government to abolish the sacramental tests much resented by Presbyterians in 1731 and 1733 but they were unsuccessful. The argument that they would promote better harmony between the different sections of the Protestant minority carried little weight with leading parliamentarians in Ireland and they were not abolished until 1780. It was, however, thought that relations between the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian churches, though still strained, were better in the 1760s than they had been in the 1720s.<sup>73</sup> Persecution in the early eighteenth century had encouraged some Presbyterian congregations in Ulster to emigrate to America, though this was sometimes, as at Aghadowey in 1718, a convenient public excuse for a much more complicated series of economic considerations that had led to the decision to emigrate.<sup>74</sup>

Recent research into the conditions of Roman Catholicism in Ireland between 1715 and 1770 has suggested that, despite their economic and political restrictions, some of the older and more partisan descriptions of Roman Catholic deprivations in the middle years of the eighteenth century have been greatly exaggerated. By the third decade of the eighteenth century any serious attempt to implement the penal legislation, or to enforce the provisions of registration against Roman Catholic clergy, had, to all intents and purposes, been abandoned. In the view of one distinguished historian of Irish Roman Catholicism:

The basic concern of the penal code was to preserve property and power in Protestant hands. As regards the practice of the Catholic religion there were two logical choices, either to mount a serious campaign to convert the Catholics to Protestantism, or to allow them freedom of religious practice under strict controls. What eventually happened was the prohibition of Catholic religious practice by a series of laws which soon proved ineffective. The established church lacked the means to mount a serious campaign of evangelisation.<sup>75</sup>

Alexander's son James, such arrangements being not uncommon among Presbyterian congregations.

<sup>72</sup> Moody and Vaughan, *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 99, 103–4; Johnston, 'Problems Common to both Protestant and Catholic Churches', 16, 29.

<sup>73</sup> Beckett, *Protestant Dissent*, 91–5, 98–9, 103.

<sup>74</sup> Holmes, *Presbyterian Church*, 67–8.

<sup>75</sup> P. J. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey*, Dublin 1985, 124.

Even Archbishop King of Dublin, who earlier in his career had favoured an active campaign of evangelization among the Irish Roman Catholic community, had by 1724 accepted ‘that there never was or is any design that all should be Protestants’.<sup>76</sup> Indeed it has been suggested that, by the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a strongly-held view among both the clergy and laity of the Church of Ireland that they had no wish to convert their Roman Catholic neighbours since they had a vested self-interest in maintaining the privileges of a political and social elite.<sup>77</sup>

An unsuccessful attempt in the Irish Parliament in 1756–7 to reintroduce provisions for the registration of the Roman Catholic clergy was opposed by the bishops of the Church of Ireland on the grounds that it would involve a ‘legal recognition of popery’. They preferred the ‘old system of legal proscription... while making no real effort to eliminate’ and the maintenance of a comfortable status quo.<sup>78</sup> Even so there were still occasions during the middle years of the eighteenth century in which the Roman Catholic community was uncomfortably reminded that the penal legislation was still in force and that passive toleration could not be guaranteed. Such incidents included the respective arrests of Bishop Sweetman of Ferns, accused of enlisting men for foreign armies in 1751, and Archbishop O’Reilly of Armagh, together with eighteen of his clergy, accused of collecting money for the Stuart cause in 1756. In 1766 Nicholas Sheehy, a priest at Clogheen in County Tipperary, was executed on a fabricated charge of murder, though his real crime was his incitement of his parishioners to refuse the payment of rents and tithes to Church of Ireland landowners and clergy. As late as 1776 Archbishop Carpenter of Dublin advised the papal nuncio to address letters to him without any use of his ecclesiastical title.<sup>79</sup>

The most significant impact of the penal laws was on the surviving groups of Roman Catholics who were landowners or who sought a career in the professions. Roman Catholics were automatically barred from acquiring land, except on short leases, and from parliamentary, administrative, legal, or military careers, by the prescription of ‘qualifying oaths, which no Catholic could take’. As a result the majority of the surviving Roman Catholic landed families, as well as those in the legal profession, ‘went over to the established church’.<sup>80</sup> The total number of known Roman Catholic converts to the

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>77</sup> M. Wall, ‘The Age of the Penal Laws’, in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. R. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, Cork 1967, 226.

<sup>78</sup> *Catholic Ireland in the Eighteenth Century: Collected Essays of Maureen Wall*, ed. G. O’Brien and T. Dunne, Dublin 1989, 98, 100.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–9; S. J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland*, Dublin 1982, 8–9.

<sup>80</sup> Moody and Martin, *Course of Irish History*, 218–19.

Church of Ireland between 1703 and 1800 was 5,797; the average number of such conversions was only 38 a year before 1751, but this increased to a yearly average of 110 in the next 20 years, before falling to a yearly average of 79 in the 1770s and 1780s, and the even lower figure of 28 a year by the 1790s. It is noticeable that the number of conversions dropped with the beginnings of the relief legislation, to remove some of the economic and political restrictions on Roman Catholics, after 1770, and it seems reasonable to conclude that the much larger number of conversions in the preceding years 'were largely induced by legal requirements and hence were nominal in nature'.<sup>81</sup> The one sector of the professions within which it was possible for Roman Catholics to practice was medicine, but even here the numbers so doing remained comparatively small. Whereas it has been estimated that the Roman Catholic proportion of the population of Dublin, a rapidly-growing city in the eighteenth century, doubled (from 35 to 70%) between 1716 and 1798, the majority of surgeons in the city were Protestants and there was no proportionate increase in the number of Roman Catholic physicians: 12 as compared with 38 protestant physicians in 1762; 14 as compared with 46 in 1799.<sup>82</sup>

There is some debate over the extent to which Roman Catholic merchants and tradesmen improved their economic position during the eighteenth century. Maureen Wall has argued that the exclusion of Roman Catholics from the political and social elites of the municipalities actually increased their wealth, since their opportunities for large-scale expenditure were so limited, and that by the 1760s the principal trade of Cork, Galway, Limerick, and Waterford was in the hands of Roman Catholic merchants.<sup>83</sup> Patrick Fagan has suggested that some of the evidence that has been adduced to support claims of increasing Roman Catholic merchant wealth in the eighteenth century needs to be treated with caution, since it is based on 'a great deal of exaggeration through the century, by persons with a particular point to make'. Fagan calculates that by about 1780 only 30% of Dublin merchants were Roman Catholics and that the proportion of trade in their hands was even lower. Although there were high proportions of Roman Catholic tradesmen in distilling (70%), brewing (60%), and grocery (50%), the figures were much lower in haberdashery (11%) and staymaking (8%), or among jewellers (10%) and goldsmiths (8%). Roman Catholic merchants were, however, active within both the Committee of Merchants and, after 1783, the Dublin Chamber of Commerce. One of their number, Anthony Dermott, 'sometimes

<sup>81</sup> T. P. Power, 'Converts', in *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. T. P. Power and K. Whelan, Blackrock 1990, 101–27.

<sup>82</sup> P. Fagan, *Catholics in A Protestant Country: The Papist Constituency in Eighteenth Century Dublin*, Dublin 1998, 45, 97–9.

<sup>83</sup> Moody and Martin, *Course of Irish History*, 78, 87.

chaired meetings of the Committee of Merchants and was elected one of the two vice-presidents of the Chamber of Commerce'.<sup>84</sup>

What cannot be denied is that the failure to enforce the penal legislation permitted the Roman Catholic church in Ireland to stabilize and improve its diocesan and parochial structure. By the 1730s most parishes had mass houses though some, especially in Ulster, still had mass-rocks and open-air services. Primitive arrangements of this kind had entirely disappeared from some of the better-administered Roman Catholic dioceses, such as Cashel and Ferns, by the 1750s. In the latter diocese the surviving records of a visitation by Bishop Sweetman in 1753 show that a parish system had been firmly established, and that every parish had at least one mass house, even if a second mass might have to be said at a 'station', usually a private house, in a far-flung part of the parish.<sup>85</sup> As early as 1727 Archbishop King of Dublin had noted that the Roman Catholics 'have more bishops in Ireland than the Protestants here, and twice (at least) as many priests. Their friaries and nunneries are public.'<sup>86</sup> This was confirmed by the 'report on popery' compiled by the clergy of the Church of Ireland, and the returns made for each diocese by its bishop, in 1731. The 1,089 priests who had registered under the Act of 1704 had increased to 1,445 and there were a total of 892 mass houses, 'besides numerous huts, sheds, and movable altars', though there was a good deal of variation between dioceses in the ratio of priests and mass houses to the number of Roman Catholic laity. In addition there were 254 regular clergy.<sup>87</sup> Archbishop Boulter of Armagh reported seventy-six Roman Catholic priests, twenty-five mass houses, and five friaries, though this was a much higher figure than that for most other Ulster dioceses. There were only nine mass houses in the diocese of Derry, five in that of Down and Connor, and two in that of Raphoe. Archbishop Hoadly of Dublin reported that in the rural parts of his diocese there were 61 Roman Catholic priests and 58 mass houses, with a further 102 priests and 16 mass houses in the city of Dublin. In Dublin some of these chapels, especially the four erected since 1714, were 'solid and in good repair, with pews and galleries and a reasonable level of altar furnishings, paintings and other decorations'. Archbishop Bolton of Cashel reported 61 Roman Catholic priests and 40 mass houses, 'several of these very lately built, some new building, particularly one at Tipperary in the form of a cross 92 feet

<sup>84</sup> Fagan, *Catholics in a Protestant Country*, 183–4.

<sup>85</sup> Corish, *Irish Catholic Experience*, 130, and *Catholic Community*, 101.

<sup>86</sup> Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 288.

<sup>87</sup> O'Brien and Dunne, *Catholic Ireland*, 49–51; Moody and Vaughan, *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 94; R. B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760–1801*, Oxford 1979, 174–6, notes that by the 1730s there were as many Roman Catholic clergy in Ireland as there were at the end of the eighteenth century.

by 72'. However, many other churches in the diocese, even in the 1750s, were 'simple rectangular structures, one third with walls of mud, all thatched and with almost no internal decoration'. This was also the situation in the diocese of Cloyne, where most mass houses were 'thatched cabins . . . open at one end'. Bolton, however, was keen to establish that the number of Roman Catholic clergy and places of worship in his diocese was considerably in excess of his own thirty-one clergy and twenty-seven churches in repair.<sup>88</sup>

Although most Irish Roman Catholic dioceses had been provided with bishops by the 1730s, the overall quality of the episcopate was somewhat lower than that of the later eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. In 1740 six bishops were non-resident in their dioceses: Patrick French (Elphin), Ambrose O'Callaghan (Ferns), James O'Daly (Kilfenora), Michael MacDonagh (Kilmore), Stephen MacEgan (Meath), and Sylvester Lloyd (Waterford and Lismore). O'Daly resided on his canonry at Tournai.<sup>89</sup> Lloyd was a particularly colourful figure, with 'an insatiable itch for foreign travel', who undertook 'intelligence work' for the Pretender James III; his father had been a clergyman in the Church of Ireland but the son, having fought in the British army, became a Roman Catholic at the age of 17 in 1697, was ordained in Portugal in 1711 and became a Franciscan friar the following year, joining the Irish Franciscan mission in 1713.<sup>90</sup> Having failed to secure the archbishopric of Dublin in 1724, he later sought and was successful in obtaining, despite strong opposition within both diocese and province, the bishopric of Killaloe, from which he was translated to Waterford and Lismore in 1739. He ceased to reside in the diocese of Killaloe in 1733 and did not reside in that of Waterford and Lismore until 1742.<sup>91</sup>

Although bishops like Lloyd were far from perfect they provided the Irish Roman Catholic Church with a leadership, largely if not wholly resident, which it had lacked for much of the seventeenth century. The bishops recognized that one of the strengths of the church, compared with the Church of Ireland, was its willingness to recognize 'that the Irish language constituted a bulwark against the encroachments of Protestant teaching, especially in rural Ireland'. The Church of Ireland, by contrast, was generally reluctant to countenance the wider use of Irish as a missionary tool at a time when the Dublin government did not wish, for political reasons, to encourage the native

<sup>88</sup> O'Brien and Dunne, *Catholic Ireland*, 36, 39, 41; Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 151.

<sup>89</sup> P. Fagan, *An Irish Bishop in Penal Times: The Chequered Career of Sylvester Lloyd OFM, 1680–1747*, Blackrock 1993, 173.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–19, 36, 196, 198. His frequent absences in Europe can be compared with those later in the eighteenth century of the Church of Ireland Bishop Hervey of Derry.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–5, 119–23, 133, 169, 174.

language. The Roman Catholic bishops authorized the publication of works in Irish, and a volume of Irish sermons by Bishop O’Gallagher of Raphoe went through several editions after it was first published in 1735. At several of the European seminaries, in which clergy of the Irish church were educated, ‘the speaking of Irish for part of each day was compulsory’ for all Irish students.<sup>92</sup>

As the diocesan and parochial structure developed in Ireland so it gradually became possible to improve the standards of Roman Catholic worship. By the middle of the eighteenth century the Roman Catholic chapel at Wexford had ‘six public masses on Sundays and three on weekdays. On Sundays there was sung vespers.’ Vespers and benediction was also the norm in the town churches of the diocese of Cloyne by 1775. At the Dominican chapel in Dublin in 1761 there was a 7 a.m. mass with sermon in Irish, 10 a.m. mass with sermon in English, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at 11 a.m. followed by benediction at noon, and vespers, rosary, and sermon in the afternoon.<sup>93</sup> In 1746 one of three mass houses in Waterford was described as:

a fine modern building, the aisles supported by stone pillars, the panels of the wainscots carved and gilded and the galleries finely adorned with paintings. Besides the great altar there are two lesser, one on either hand, over each of which there are curious paintings.<sup>94</sup>

By 1793 even this chapel was not considered sufficiently opulent for its purpose and was replaced by the present cathedral. Another aspect of Roman Catholic piety that was strong in the early eighteenth century, but which was to cause difficulties in later years, was the pilgrimages to traditional sites, which had survived more than a century of religious disruption. Bishop MacMahon of Clogher noted in 1714 that the pilgrimage to St Patrick’s Purgatory on Lough Derg, in his diocese, was attracting about 5,000 pilgrims a year. It had been allowed to survive because the toll income from the pilgrims benefited the Protestant family that had leased the island from the Church of Ireland bishop of Clogher.<sup>95</sup>

Generally speaking the relations between the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland greatly improved during the first half of the eighteenth century, despite the occasional outburst of polemic. This situation was much assisted by the conciliatory attitude of the Roman Catholic bishops, who were anxious to prove that they were loyal subjects of the British Crown. In 1757 Bishop O’Keefe of Kildare specifically rejected any notion that the papacy could depose sovereigns, dispense from oaths, or

<sup>92</sup> O’Brien and Dunne, *Catholic Ireland*, 4; Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 300.

<sup>93</sup> Corish, *Catholic Community*, 85, 89.

<sup>94</sup> Fagan, *Irish Bishop in Penal Times*, 178.

<sup>95</sup> O’Brien and Dunne, *Catholic Ireland*, 52–3.

exercise temporal jurisdiction outside the papal states. With James III now dead, prayers for George III began to be offered in Irish Roman Catholic churches from 1768.<sup>96</sup> There are many instances of Roman Catholics and Protestants attending one another's funerals or of Protestants contributing to the building costs of Roman Catholic chapels. On the other hand there were still three parishes in the diocese of Killala in 1771 where Protestant landlords would not allow a mass house to be built, and in 1781 Lord Doneraile closed all the Roman Catholic chapels on his estates, and assaulted the priest involved, after one of his Roman Catholic tenants had been excommunicated. Despite the 'degree of ease in the relations between Catholics and Protestants . . . the whole system made for tensions . . . Protestants never lost the fear of an overthrow of the settlement . . . and Catholics never lost the fear that active persecution might come again'.<sup>97</sup>

The religious situation in Ireland in 1770 was one of comparative stability in which all the religious groups in the country had achieved what they felt was a satisfactory *modus vivendi*. The Church of Ireland had, after a very difficult beginning in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the comfort of being an established church, even if it only commanded the loyalty of a small minority of the population of Ireland, though its weaknesses were all too apparent: a heavy dependency on the landed classes since the majority of those in other classes were either Roman Catholics or Presbyterians; a relatively even but thin distribution over the whole of Ireland, not concentrated in a few areas as the Presbyterians were; an inequitable distribution of clerical incomes with a much greater gap between those of the higher and lower clergy than in England; an insufficiency of clergy in relation to the overall population, though not so if related solely to its actual support in the country. Whereas the population of Ireland more than doubled, from 2.5 to 5.5 million, during the eighteenth century, the clergy of the Church of Ireland only increased in number from 700 to 1,100.<sup>98</sup> The Roman Catholic Church in Ireland had survived its greatest period of challenge and active persecution during the seventeenth century. It had used the comparative stability of the period 1720–70 to consolidate its support among the population and to create an effective diocesan and parochial structure. The Presbyterians still suffered from political restrictions but they enjoyed freedom of worship and the ability to develop their own structures and to engage in the luxury of internal theological debate. In 1770 the churches of Ireland were about to embark on a new phase in their existence. It was one in which both the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church were to undergo an

<sup>96</sup> Johnston, *Ireland*, 41–2.

<sup>97</sup> Corish, *Catholic Community*, 92, 98, 106.

<sup>98</sup> Johnston, *Ireland*, 48–50.

intensive period of internal reform, but in which the former was to feel the beginnings of the end of establishment. It was also a period in which religious developments in Ireland took place against a background of profound administrative, economic, political, and social change, and the first stirrings of a very different phase in the long struggle for Irish independence.