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Afterword
**Ireland's mysterious minority -
a French-Irish comparison**

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Introduction

How Irish Protestants see themselves and their place in the wider society is one of the remaining mysteries of Irish life. In a society where virtually every social category and institution has been brought into focus, meditated on and moralised about, this one remains elusive. It might be attributed to their very small numbers. But they loom larger in the public imagination than the numbers alone might warrant. They are central to the history of the island; their imprint is on the landscape and on its cultural institutions; their churches, schools and hospitals occupy central places in its cities and towns; they occupy leading positions in key sectors of the society; they are formally represented at public events; their historic university – Trinity College – remains at the centre of Irish cultural life; their cathedrals and once great houses are must-see places for foreign tourists. There is more than enough to talk about. Instead there is a wariness and a silence that points to a reluctance on both sides to engage with the issue. Protestants prefer to deal with matters of concern privately and discreetly, and Catholics are happy to oblige. This is consistent with the general pattern of majority-minority relations. Majorities tend not to think of minorities unless they are powerful, influential, or troublesome. Minorities feel vulnerable and dislike drawing attention to themselves. But there are also issues specific to the Irish case: the long history of Catholic-Protestant conflict on the island, the circumstances in which independence was secured, the question of how Southern Protestants were treated by the new state. One consequence has been a reluctance on the part of Protestants to be too explicit about how they see themselves, the wider society, and their place within it.

The situation of Protestants in the new state Ireland has been discussed since its foundation, though it has rarely been central to public debate. In the 1920s the *Irish Statesman* journal, and in the 1940s the *Bell* magazine, dealt with it from time to time. The 1960s saw the publication of Brian Inglis's *West Briton* and Michael Viney's series of articles, *The Five Per Cent*. The 1970s saw Jack White's *Minority Report*. The 1980s brought Kurt Bowen's *Protestants in a Catholic State*. The 2000s saw Colin Murphy and Lynne Adair's compendium *Untold Stories* and Heather Crawford's *Outside the Glow*. So far the 2010s have seen Brian Walker's *A History of the Two Irelands*, Robin Bury's *Buried Lives*, and now the current volume.¹ Recurring themes for the immediate post-independence decades include the materially privileged position of Protestants, the fall in their numbers, their attitude to the new state, their continuing attachment to the Crown, the effects of the *ne temere* decree, sectarianism, the difficulty of being a tiny minority in a society that was fervently Catholic, the (Catholic) tendency to define Irishness in terms of nationalism and Catholicity, and (most recently) the violence inflicted on Protestants during the war of independence and civil war. These books were widely read within the Protestant community.² It is not clear how much they were read outside of it.

The reluctance on both sides to make the position of Protestants a subject of public debate has had consequences for the way in which the society developed. It has also had consequences for the unresolved politics of the island. The Northern Protestant response to suggestions of closer contact with the South is mediated by their perception of how southern Protestants have been treated – in their view very badly.³ They focus in particular on the fall in their numbers, which they take to be a symptom of their marginality and lack of acceptance. Some southern Protestants contest that view; others share it. But there has been no serious debate about it. Whatever the reality, the perception has consequences. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 has not stabilised the politics of the island. Brexit has brought further uncertainty and demographic change in the North continues. The question of reunification has not gone away. Despite their small numbers, southern Protestants are a distinct and important part of the political geometry of the island. Greater clarity about how they see themselves, how they view their past, how they define their relationship to the Irish state and to Irishness, might permit a more effective response to the challenges and difficulties that reunification would pose.

The focus of this Afterword, and of the book as whole, is on the Republic's historic or core Protestant community, now centuries-old and thoroughly indigenous. This is not the total Protestant population recorded in the census. The numbers in the census have grown significantly since the 1990s, from 3.2% of the total population in 1991 to 4.2% in 2016.⁴ Some of this is attributable to immigration, evident in the figures on ethnic and religious diversity.⁵ The numbers

also include the children of mixed marriages who were baptised Protestant but are not necessarily being reared as such, and disillusioned Catholics who have converted religiously, but remain culturally Catholic. It is difficult to give a precise figure for the core community. But if one takes 1991 as a benchmark – before large-scale immigration and before the scandals in the Catholic Church – and allows for some increase, a working estimate would be 3.5%.

I begin with two opposing views of how Protestants have fared since independence. I then point to the new direction opened up by this volume: how Protestants forged their path within the new state and reconstructed their politics, identity and sense of belonging. After this, I concentrate on a specific issue and look at it historically and comparatively: the adaptive strategy that Irish and (later) southern Irish Protestants have used to meet the challenge of being a minority in a Catholic-majority society. The comparison is with the similarly-sized (3.1%) Protestant minority in France.⁶ Finally, I contrast the responses of Irish Protestants and Catholics to recent social and cultural challenges. On both comparisons, Irish Protestants stand out as distinctive.

Current Views of Southern Irish Protestants

There are two sharply contrasting dominant narratives of the experiences of southern Protestants since independence. One speaks of 'privilege', the other of 'victimhood'. The 'privilege' view is the traditional Catholic one, though it is shared by some Protestants and also informs Kurt Bowen's sociological work *Protestants in a Catholic State: Ireland's Privileged Minority*.⁷ As the title suggests, it sees post-independence Protestants still in possession of most of the privileges they had accumulated during the period of British rule: the larger farms and better land, leading positions in banking, stock-broking, industry and the higher professions; well-appointed churches and possession of Dublin's two cathedrals; control of Ireland's oldest and highest-status university; residence in the better parts of Dublin and Cork; possession of a network of exclusive schools, sports and social clubs. If Protestants were outside the mainstream of the new society, this is assumed to be by choice: resentment that the British link had been broken, disdain for the new state and its institutions, a sense of religious and social superiority, a way of safeguarding privileges. Those who hold the privilege view apply it mainly to the post-independence decades and either see it as no longer relevant today or are not sure. But it lingers as a set of stereotypes and presuppositions, and still has currency in rural areas. These themes are well covered in the introductory chapter of this volume, and particularly in the essays by Ian d'Alton, Tomás Irish and Frank Barry.

The 'victim' view of southern Protestants is traditionally the Protestant one, though it is now shared by many Catholics. It was an important strand in Protestant writings between the 1920s and 1940s. It came back in a more nuanced way in the 1970s, became more pronounced in the 1980s, and has become sharper in tone since then.⁸ Robin Bury's recent *Buried Lives* is in that tradition. He describes a community subject to a terrifying onslaught of hostility, intimidation and violence during the war of independence, followed by the forced exodus of large numbers, leaving it with a weakened and ever-weakening demographic base. There was job discrimination in the state sector, achieved in part by the Irish language requirement. Their numbers were further eroded by the *Ne temere* decree, and the exacting of a promise by the Protestant party to a mixed marriage that the children would be reared as Catholic, a promise given legal status by the Supreme Court Tilson judgement of 1950. Added to this was the general undercurrent of Catholic resentment and hostility to Protestants that surfaced in the Fethard-on-Sea boycott of 1957.⁹ Most who hold the victim view accept that the situation has changed since then, but believe that there are still issues, particularly on matters of identity and belonging.¹⁰

The victim view has gained strength in the recent period for two reasons. One is the much greater attention being paid by historians to the experience of Protestants during the War of independence and Civil War. This began in the 1990s with the writings of the late Peter Hart on the IRA in west Cork during the war of Independence and civil war, and his vivid description of the killing of 13 Protestants in the Bandon Valley in late April 1922.¹¹ Though reference had been made to these killings before, this was the first time they were dealt with in detail, and the claim that they were sectarian bluntly stated.¹² The timing was important. Hart's research coincided with the Northern Ireland peace process and intensified debates about the extent to which the campaign of the Provisional IRA had been sectarian. Not everyone who saw the recent campaign as sectarian extended this back to the earlier one, but some did.¹³ Hart's claims appeared to find support in later accounts of killings in Cork city and at Coolacree in Co. Offaly in 1921.¹⁴ However, critics have questioned Hart's use of sources and the interpretation advanced in his and later studies.¹⁵ The debate has been rancorous, with accusations of political bias and bad faith on both sides.

The second reason the victim view resonates more today is because the status of victim is now routinely conferred on large sections of the population during the first five decades of the new state, with the perpetrators the same in both cases: the Catholic Church, nationalist ideologues and the state. The list is long: married women confined to the home, women pregnant outside of marriage, women who lost their children to enforced adoption, anyone seeking contraceptives or knowledge about them, girls taught by censorious nuns, boys

taught by abusive Christian Brothers, boys pressured into playing Gaelic football when they wanted to play soccer, anyone who was ever in care, everyone who was forced to learn a nationalist version of Irish history and the Irish language, anyone wishing to read the banned works of modern literature, the poor, the unemployed, emigrants. If Catholics were victims in the state they had built for themselves, how much worse must it have been for Protestants?

While the question of Protestant privilege or victimhood is usually treated in either/or terms, it is possible to hold both views simultaneously. One option would be to see some Protestants as privileged and others as victims. The historian, John A. Murphy, responded to claims of ‘ethnic cleansing’ in West Cork with the comment that ‘there was no ethnic cleansing of the South Mall’;¹⁶ the journalist Eoghan Harris frequently contrasts the experience of isolated Protestant small farmers in west Cork with that of comfortable middle-class Protestants in suburban Dublin. A second option would be to see post-independence Protestants as materially privileged, but suffering culturally. Deirdre Nuttall’s chapter in this volume brings further illumination to this issue.

Much more research is needed on this question and there are insights to be gained from both perspectives. The research benefits of doing so are obvious. But there is another reason. At issue is not simply a narrative of history, but the construction of an identity. Identities have a ‘path dependent’ quality, in the sense that once an identity is embraced, it tends to embed itself in ways that make it enduring. This is more likely in the case of the victim view than the privilege one. The time of Protestant privilege is over, but the consequences of Protestant demographic decline are still there. If the decline is attributed to victimhood, and a victim identity is embraced, it promises to be of long duration.¹⁷

This volume does not ignore the question of privilege or victimhood, but its main purpose is to open new themes in the history of post-independence southern Protestants. It also breaks with the tendency of the literature to treat their experience in particularist terms. Irish religious divisions were far from *sui generis*. Confessional division was the norm in most of Europe from the 17th to the 20th century, sometimes with ethnic overtones, and was often a source of conflict during periods of state and nation building. The idea of a ‘Protestant Free state’ might seem exotic, but there are likely to be similar cases in other parts of Europe.¹⁸ This highlights the need for comparison, both within and beyond Europe. In this volume, Niamh Dillon brings an India-Ireland comparison to bear on questions of Britishness. This chapter compares the Irish Protestant minority with that of France to see how two small and vulnerable minorities have dealt with the challenge of surviving in an overwhelmingly Catholic society. French Protestants have given

much more attention to questions of history and identity than Irish Protestants. What accounts for the difference?

French Protestants

France and Ireland are polar opposites on most indicators. France has long been one of Europe's largest, richest, most populous, and most continuous states, and historically an empire as well as a state. For most of its history Ireland was an English/British periphery, colonised, underpopulated, materially-poor. The present-day Republic of Ireland has been independent for less than a century. The French reformation was home grown, the difference between French Catholics and Protestants was wholly religious, and foreign involvement was minimal. The Irish reformation came as part of the English conquest, the difference was ethnic as well as religious, and the British state was the dominant actor throughout. In France, Catholics won the wars of religion and the French penal laws targeted a tiny Protestant minority. In Ireland, the Protestant minority won and the target of the Irish penal laws was the Catholic majority. In France political and religious emancipation came with the Revolution of 1789, and opened the way to full integration into the state and nation. In Ireland the undoing of the penal laws was dragged out, the last stage of political emancipation required mass Catholic mobilisation, and rather than integration into the (British) state and nation, the outcome was the secession of most of the island. France today is one of Europe's most secular states with a strict separation between church and state. The Republic of Ireland remains one of its most religious and church and state are still entwined.¹⁹

Differences of that magnitude raise the question of whether the two cases can usefully be compared. One reason they can is that the twists and turns of Irish history have produced an unexpected convergence: partition left a Protestant minority in the Republic of Ireland that today is of the same proportions as the one in France. In both countries the total Protestant population is growing as a result of immigration and conversion, but the historic Protestant community appears to be stable. This allows us to compare how two minorities of equivalent size have managed their situation.

How French Protestants have done it – and still do so today - can only be understood in their light of their history. The French religious wars of the 16th century were exceptionally violent with massacres and extreme cruelty during and between wars.²⁰ By far the worst was the St Bartholomew's Day massacre in Paris in 1572, originally aimed at the Protestant leadership but going beyond that, and extending from the capital to the provinces. Thousands died, and many more

converted to save their lives. Protestants were 11% of the population of France in 1562; by 1600 they were 5.5.²¹ Despite their small numbers they were sufficiently powerful militarily to secure substantial rights in the Edict of Nantes of 1598. However, as the 17th century progressed, their rights were cut back. From the 1660s its terms were more strictly and harshly applied, then systematically breached. In 1685 the edict was revoked in its entirety, making Protestantism illegal.

The Revocation was a disaster for an already very small Protestant community and it remains the great wound in the collective memory. Some fled the country, others converted. By 1702 their numbers had dropped to 2%.²² Those who remained faced harsh measures. Troops were quartered in Protestant homes until the family converted; churches and meeting houses were destroyed; pastors were tortured and executed; men arrested at clandestine assemblies were sent to the galleys and women to prison; children were taken from Protestant homes and placed in Catholic convents.²³ The severity with which these measures were enforced varied by time and place, depending on the attitude of local intendants, priests and bishops. The worst was over by the second half of the century, but the execution of Jean Calas was in 1762 and the last of the female prisoners in the Tour de Constance was not released until 1768.²⁴ Despite the persecutions most Protestants refused to yield. When obliged to, they observed the external forms of Catholicism but dissented internally. They read their bibles in private, had their children secretly baptised by itinerant pastors, buried their dead in their gardens rather than in the Catholic cemetery, and attended clandestine religious assemblies.

A measure of legal toleration was introduced in 1787. Two years later the Revolution transformed the situation and by 1793 Protestants had full religious and political rights. A succession of constitutional regimes followed, including a restored constitutional monarchy and an empire, but the principle of confessional equality had been established. The Revolution also put in place a new, citizenship-based, understanding of the French nation, undoing the ancien régime's equivalence of Catholicity and Frenchness.²⁵

The eighteenth century penal laws had ruled out direct participation in law and government, but did not restrict Protestants' economic opportunities. Many prospered in banking, business and trade and built up sizeable fortunes. This, together with their traditional emphasis on literacy and education, left them well positioned to take advantage of the economic opportunities opening up in the 19th century as France's economic modernization got underway. One consequence was that in the religiously mixed areas Protestants were on balance wealthier than Catholics, with a stronger socio-economic profile, very often the employers of a Catholic workforce. Protestants played a key role in politics during the early

decades of the Third Republic, particularly in the establishment of a second level school system, and in drafting the law of separation of church and state of 1905.²⁶ By this time, they had rebuilt their churches, schools, hospitals and organisations of social relief, and had established colleges to educate new generations of pastors.

They also devoted much effort to reconstructing their history and to creating institutions—journals, museums—to preserve and disseminate it. They did this partly for themselves, partly to respond to continued Catholic mistrust and criticism. Religion was central to the answer of who they were: it had set them apart and continued to do so. But history came a close second. Calvinist theology pointed to an identity based solely on the faith and commitment of the present-day community of believers. But they existed as a community only because their ancestors had resisted and had survived the years of persecution. History was not incidental to who they were, it was at the heart of it, and an essential part of the explanation for why they existed at all. It was a history that was at once dolorous and glorious, and it made them more than simply a religious denomination. It made them in some sense a people, one with a tragic past and heroic ancestors to whom they owed a duty of memory.²⁷

Equally important was the question of how and where they fitted into French history and society. Their exclusion from the mainstream of French life, and the view that as Protestant they could not be truly French, had cut deep. They argued that not alone were they wholly French and had always been loyal to France, they had brought something of great value to it: a tradition of individual judgement, freedom of conscience, religious freedom, respect for difference, rejection of arbitrary authority, a stress on literacy and education. In particular, they had contributed to the Enlightenment and through that to the Revolution. They would now help France keep pace with the technological and economic advances happening in competitor countries, in particular Protestant Britain and Germany. Underlying these claims was a view of France as historically held back by its Catholicism, a religion of superstition and clericalism, hostile to progress, education, science and modernity.

Liberal and anti-clerical Catholics were inclined to be sympathetic to these views, but the Catholic Church and those in the monarchical tradition remained hostile, holding Protestants substantially responsible for the Revolution and the Terror and the attacks on the Church that accompanied it. They challenged their theological views and version of history, monitored and denounced their influence on government and over-representation in the civil service and in finance, insisted that France was a Catholic nation, questioned their Frenchness and loyalty to France and, after the French defeat by Protestant Prussia in 1870, accused them of having collaborated with them.²⁸ Relations at local level depended on the demographic balance. In most parts of France there were so few Protestants that Catholics hardly

came across them. In the mixed areas, particularly those in the south of the country with a history of division, Protestant claims to special virtues added to existing tensions.

The 20th century brought a softening of attitudes, though the old attitudes survived in some places and among some families until the 1960s. The situation today—two generations later—is very different. The opposition of Protestant and Catholic no longer has the same depth or meaning. Ecumenism had a major impact, the cultural revolution of 1968 a greater one, and the shift to a hyper-individualistic, advanced consumer society a still bigger one. Confessional identities are more lightly held, if held at all, and more easily bracketed. Church attendance is very low. The dynamic sectors in Protestantism are evangelical. Many of today's evangelicals are not descendants of the historic Protestant community, and those who are, are more interested in their faith than in what happened in the past. Some of the historic Protestant community are still believers; most are not, or what they believe is only loosely based on the Bible. Intermarriage with Catholics (usually non-practicing ones) is frequent, the children of mixed unions are often not baptised, or if they are, receive little religious formation. The presumption of cultural superiority to Catholics has gone: with greater education and less obedience to their Church, Catholics are thought to have now 'caught up'.²⁹

These changes, in particular the decline in belief and practice, have led to concerns among French Protestants about the survival of their distinctive identity, but they are determined to preserve it.³⁰ This is done partly by building a positive version of the identity, one that will allow younger generations of Protestants to proud of their past, whether or not they have religious beliefs.³¹ The claim is that (unlike Catholicism) theirs was a religion based on freedom of conscience, reason and the Bible; their history was one of courage and survival; their culture was progressive and enlightened; their values - rooted in their experience of persecution – include concern for the suffering of others, particularly those subjected to deprivation or arbitrary authority. At a time when other identities have become fractured or disvalued, this makes an attractive package, a heritage to embrace, even if one is not personally religious. Given their small numbers and history of marginality, recognition is important. In September 2017, in a speech at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, President Macron stressed the profound contribution which Protestants and Protestant values had made to France, declared that Protestant blood flows in the veins of France, and that France needs its Protestants to remain watchtowers of the Republic.³² The comments were appreciated, but the matter did not stop there. Some months after, 20 prominent Protestants sent him open letters detailing the things they wanted him to attend to.³³

Irish Protestants in the light of the French Example

The major social and political differences between the French and Irish cases were listed above. A further one will now be added: the amount of attention each Protestant minority has given to clarifying its history, identity and relationship to the wider society. French Protestants have done this for a long time, and it continues to be the subject of books, articles and conference papers, as well as a recurring theme in their weekly newspaper, *Réforme*. Irish Protestants also write books, articles and hold conferences. There are church-based history societies with libraries and archives, and the Church of Ireland also has a weekly newspaper, the *Church of Ireland Gazette*. There are works that draw attention to some of the ways in which they feel ill-treated. There are also ones that touch on general identity issues.³⁴ Despite this, a clear picture of contemporary Irish Protestant identity (or identities) does not emerge. The clarity with which President Macron was able to convey French Protestant self-understanding would not be possible in Ireland.

Irish Protestants also differ in this respect from Irish Catholics who since the 1980s have incessantly analysed their identity in an unending stream of academic and popular works, opinion columns, novels, plays, poetry, or on television and radio programmes.³⁵ Most of these speak of 'Irish' rather than 'Catholic Irish', but the two are usually interchangeable. If an Irish government wanted to make a statement about how the Catholic Irish view themselves and the nation, it would have no difficulty knowing what to say. If it had to do the same for the Protestant Irish, it would struggle.

How are these differences – between French and Irish Protestants, and between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland - to be explained? There are differences between the two national cultures – the French tend to intellectualise more than the Irish - but this would not explain the Irish Catholic-Protestant difference. I begin with the French-Irish Protestant difference, explaining it in terms of the historical challenge each faced as a minority and the strategy it adopted to deal with it. I then look at the Catholic-Protestant difference.

French Protestants were a product of an indigenous reformation movement and their fate would depend on developments within France. From time to time they could get help from outside – in particular from Holland or from England – but reliance on outside help risked accusations of treason that could make their situation worse. Their only option was to rely on their own resources: their economic enterprise, their political adaptability, their culture of resistance, their ability to spot dangers and opportunities and to respond appropriately. This meant achieving a clear understanding of who they were, what their options were, and where they might fit into wider French society. This

is the historical basis of the high degree of reflexivity of French Protestants: it was first and foremost the adaptive response of a minority to a sustained existential challenge.

Irish Protestants faced an existential challenge of equivalent magnitude, but its origins were different, and so was their response. They came as strangers and conquerors to a land that already had its own identity and traditions. They were also assigned the task of transforming it, including converting it religiously and assimilating it culturally. From the beginning they had had to address pressing questions of legitimacy. Their claim to property and to rule rested mainly on rights on conquest, but also on their political, religious and cultural mission: to bring order, progress, religious enlightenment and political liberty to a chaotic, backward, superstitious, and priest-ridden island. It was a claim that remained at the heart of their identity for generations.³⁶ It also contributed to the alienation of the native population, the failure of the hoped-for religious conversion, and the limited nature of the cultural assimilation. It was a historic failure and it left them a permanently small and vulnerable minority.

Their strategy of defence had two strands: secure a monopoly of economic resources and political power, and retain the support of the British state. This worked for a long time, but from the second part of the 18th century, a Catholic recovery was underway, and the British state was becoming receptive to Catholic demands. By the end of the 19th century their position had been substantially eroded in the Catholic-majority parts of the island.³⁷ By this time also any hope of reconciling Catholic-Protestant differences by reconfiguring identities was long gone; Catholic nationalists rejected their Irishness and their historic civilising claims, and were demanding Home Rule. The only hope now was to put their trust in the British government and the politics of unionism. In the end both let them down.

The nationalist struggle for independence reconfigured and renewed the sense of existential threat that Irish Protestants had always lived with. Some saw no future for themselves and left. Most stayed and the situation turned out to be less fearsome than many expected. The war of independence did not last long, the violence was concentrated in parts of the country, and those at risk were mainly those who served – or were suspected of serving – the British state. Once the new government had established its control, the situation became more promising. They already had a strong economic base, a well-developed ecclesiastical infrastructure, a major university, a network of schools, hospitals, sports and social clubs. The new state left all of that in place. Its own sympathies lay with the political and religious views of the majority, but it was anxious to show its neutrality and fairness. It was not the state Protestants would have preferred, but it was one they could work with. Independence led to some reflection on questions of history and identity, but not much. It was not necessary – and as the essays in this volume by Conor Morrissey, Ian d’Alton, and Miriam Moffitt show – there were reasons not to dwell too much on it.

The post-independence independence period was a challenging time, but the challenges were manageable. The religious one is better understood from the perspective of confessionalism than of sectarianism. Confessionalism may be defined as the generally accepted activities that churches and their members engage in to mark and maintain their difference. Sectarianism is action that breaches those norms. The boundary between the confessional and the sectarian changes over time, and what is seen as confessional at one point in time may be viewed as sectarian at another. Like much of Europe, Ireland had been confessionalised for centuries and the division was taken for granted. The British state had worked with it, initially to control the island, later because they had no choice. The new state did the same. In its time, the British state had tilted towards Protestantism. The new one tilted towards Catholicism, but Protestant religious rights were fully respected. The Tilson judgement is widely viewed as evidence of the sectarianism of the state. Yet it was more neutral in law than in the manner in which it was presented, and Protestant opinion on it was divided.³⁸ The Fethard-on-Sea boycott is often taken to be clear evidence of Catholic sectarianism, and it certainly showed how a family confessional dispute on the education of the children could escalate into a communal sectarian one. But Catherine O'Connor's essay in this volume shows that it cannot be reduced to a simple Catholic-Protestant bipolarity. Equally telling, such examples were rare. The difficulty Protestants faced was less sectarianism than confessionalism in a context of severe demographic imbalance: the extraordinary public Catholicity of the country and the impossibility of getting away from it.³⁹ Even then, there was an upside: it provided robust and reassuring confirmation of their own religious identity.

Much has also been made of the cultural oppressiveness of the post-independence period – the identification of the state with the nationalist narrative of Irish history, the foregrounding of the Irish language and requirement that all school-children learn it, the hostility shown to expressions of a British identity or loyalty. This was a burden, but it has to be seen in context. In practice, the British legacy remained all-pervasive: the English language, Georgian buildings, British street names, British coinage, statues of British heroes, country estates and mansions, TCD, the interiors of Dublin's two cathedrals, the Royal Irish Academy, the Royal Dublin Society, Dublin Castle, the Viceregal Lodge. Some steps were taken to undo this, but they were on a limited scale. New public bodies were given Irish names, there was much token use of Irish, some Georgian houses were allowed to fall down, some streets were re-named, the more prominent statues were removed, Dublin Castle and the Viceregal Lodge were taken over (though used for a similar purpose), expressions of political and cultural nationalism were at times intense. But much remained as it was. As Ian d'Alton points out in this volume, post-independence Dublin still had, pro-rata, twice as many streets named after Queen Victoria as London. Elsewhere he has shown that, if one chose carefully, one could continue to live as if not much had changed.⁴⁰

The post-independence period was one of continuity as well as rupture at all level and this was also evident in the adaptive strategy of the Protestant minority. Allegiance had to be transferred from one state to another, but the basic approach was the same: support and secure the support of the existing state, and defend their strong economic, social and institutional base. Addressing identity issues in the manner of French Protestants might have brought some additional benefit, but perhaps not much. Defending the difference was more important than analysing what exactly it was.

I turn now to Irish Protestant-Catholic differences on identity matters, focusing on their different responses to recent challenges. Post-independence Ireland did not cut itself off from the outside world. The preoccupation with events and developments elsewhere continued, as did the fascination with the modern. Local and national newspapers and magazines reported on world events, there was a steady inflow of books, newspapers, magazines, films and popular music. People travelled. Emigrants wrote home and some returned.⁴¹ But the extent of openness increased exponentially after the 1960s, making the country today one of the most open in the world. The internal changes that accompanied this opening out were also far-reaching. Post-independence Ireland was rural, agricultural, small town, materially struggling, familistic, localistic, poorly educated, deeply religious, deferential to and fearful of state and religious authority. Very little of this remains. The population is now predominantly urban; its economy is industrial and service-based; there is wealth and affluence; education levels are high; the values are individualist and consumerist; religious belief and church attendance remain high by international standards, but secularism has taken a deep hold; there is scepticism towards all forms of authority, particularly clerical.⁴² There were other developments. The Second Vatican Council opened the way to Catholic ecumenism and brought liturgical reforms that undid much of the visible difference between Catholicism and the variety of Protestantisms. The collapse of the Northern state between 1969 and 1972 was followed by more than two decades of prolonged paramilitary violence. Southerners tried to keep their distance from it, but it impinged at every level, and the condition of a settlement was an end to the politics of reunification in place since the foundation of the state. The 1990s brought further dramatic changes: an economic take-off that produced an unprecedented level of wealth, the first significant immigration for centuries, and the birth of a multi-cultural society.

These changes can be viewed as the more or less inevitable convergence of Ireland with other western societies, later in respect to post-war modernisation, earlier as far as globalisation is concerned. But they did not just happen. They were undertaken as solutions to pressing problems and actively pursued by those in positions of leadership or by those who campaigned for them. Decisions had to be made, laws changed, policies implemented, established practices questioned, changed or abandoned. Not everyone wanted the changes, and some were deeply opposed to them, but change of some kind

could not be avoided. Some groups benefited, others lost. Each stage was marked by public and private debate. Ideological as well as practical choices had to be made, and the ideological battles were often sharper and more wounding than the practical ones.

Catholics and Protestants were equally affected by the changes, but the challenges were different and their responses also differed. For Catholics there was the shock of realisation that more was at issue than simply working out new policies. The cultural certainties of the post-independence decades were dissolving. Their understanding of their state and nation was coming into question, as was the nationalism and Catholicism on which it was based. At a cultural level it was a challenge of existential proportions, and they responded to it in the way they responded to such challenges in the past: by re-opening and re-engaging with questions of history and identity. This was the context for the outpouring of reflection and analysis and the identity debates of the 1980s and 1990s. Protestants contributed to the historiographical work, but the public debates and the work of cultural and ideological reconstruction was almost wholly by those within the Catholic-nationalist tradition. How much the debates influenced the direction the society took is questionable: wider economic, political, and cultural forces were more important. But the debates shaped the meaning of what was happening, legitimised the decisions made, and ensured continuity between past and present.

Protestants responded to these debates with a degree of reticence, since they involved the politically sensitive questions of nationalism and Catholicism.⁴³ In any case, most of the new directions being taken were ones they approved of and had wanted for a long time. They were also aware that Catholics were finding the work of demolition painful enough without Protestants interjecting a 'We told you so', even if it could sometimes be heard in the pauses, or read between the lines. Like their French counterparts, Irish Catholics were 'catching up' and they could be let get on with it.

Meanwhile, Protestants faced challenges of a different kind. From the 1970s they were opening up the sectors they had once controlled to Catholic entry: Protestants businesses, Trinity College, second-level schools, sports and social clubs.⁴⁴ There were political reasons for doing this: ecumenism made separation by religion seem backward and intolerant, and the conflict in Northern Ireland provided evidence of the dangers. But practical considerations were more important. The times were more dynamic and more competitive, and it was a question of adapt or go under.⁴⁵ Their biggest problem was one of scale: their numbers and their world were too small. To grow they had to open up and allow Catholics in. This brought benefits, but at a cost. Their control of these sectors had served the community well, helping it to maintain its ethos, numbers, coherence, and internal social order. They had provided spaces where patronage was exercised, contacts made, deals done, favours exchanged, networks built, matches made, and the sense of an Irish Protestant world sustained. They had offered

reassurance that the community was taking care of its own. The entry of Catholics complicated that.

The opening up was by no means total. There were still wholly Protestant spaces: church activities (even if participation has been falling) and the Protestant primary school sector, which brought together the children of Protestant families and – just as important – their parents. Many of the firms that had been Protestant retained the imprint of their past and even today some of these have a disproportionate Protestant presence at higher executive and board level. Trinity College retains much of its past ethos, particularly at staff level. Second-level schools use selection criteria that give priority to Protestant applicants, and their boards of management remain majority Protestant. One-time Protestant sports clubs remain disproportionately Protestant. But the extent of control has diminished, making it difficult to carry out the previous functions. There are still strong Protestant networks which do this, but they are less visible and it is less evident to the wider community that they are doing so. This coincides with increasing intermarriage and cultural convergence. These changes can be – and usually are – viewed in positive terms, but they also have implications for Protestant numbers, social cohesion, and cultural distinctiveness. This raises the question of whether the traditional adaptive strategy is still fit for purpose. The state remains supportive, but the once protected Protestant economic and social sector has been substantially eroded. This is a new situation, and it may demand a fresh approach.

Protestant leaders and members of the community are responding to the challenge in practical ways. They include special efforts to sustain the sense of community at the level of parish and school, intensive lobbying to secure state support for Protestant schools, and the extraordinary efforts of some parents to secure places for their children in Protestant schools, even if the Protestantism of some of these is in question. They have not responded in the traditional manner of their French counterparts: publicly defining and projecting a clear and positive image of who they are, what their history has been, what it means to be Protestant, and what Protestantism has contributed to their country.⁴⁶ They also differ from Irish Catholics whose response to recent challenges is much closer to the French Protestant one.⁴⁷

What explains the Irish Protestant reluctance to engage with questions of history and identity in the same way? The most likely explanation is that they do not see a need or benefit to doing so. There are challenges but it is not a crisis. Protestant numbers fell continuously until 1991, but they have been stable since then, and may have grown slightly. Moreover, what works for French Protestants and Irish Catholics would not necessarily work for them, and there could be risks in trying it. Their history does not support the single historic – and heroic – narrative available to their French counterparts and Catholic sensitivities to the past have not entirely gone away.⁴⁸ A second possible explanation is that, even if there were benefits to doing so, they do not wish to expose

themselves to public scrutiny or to mark their distinctiveness to that degree. It is not as if they are invisible: their historical imprint is everywhere, and they continue to have a strong institutional presence. Beyond that, they simply want to be accepted, to feel they belong, to have their difference respected, and to be let get on with their lives. A third possibility is that since they have not done this kind of identity-work in the past, it would be difficult to begin it now.

Conclusion

By way of a conclusion a final question might be asked: whether there is anything that might lead southern Protestants to engage with questions of history and identity in as focused and public a manner as French Protestants or Irish Catholics. There is a possible circumstance, and it was referred to at the outset: Irish reunification. Irish unity may never happen; it could happen a long time from now; or it could come quicker than anyone imagines. In general, Southern Protestants have kept their distance from the politics of the island, but they are an important part of its political geometry. If ever there is movement towards reunification, they could play an important role. They might choose not to; or the Irish government and Northern unionists could ignore them and concentrate on working out a deal with one another. But they have an interest in the outcome, and it would offer a historic opportunity to once again play a role in the politics of the island. Doing so would mean breaking with their low-key approach and asserting themselves forcefully in public debate. They could meet resistance, not least from Southern Catholics long accustomed to the comfort of Protestant reticence and discretion. If they choose to play such a role, they will need a clear view of who they were, who they are today, and what they could like an island-wide settlement to be. It might be better reflect on such matters now than wait until then.

ENDNOTES

¹ Brian Inglis, *West Briton* (London: Faber and Faber 1962); Michael Viney, *The Five Per Cent: A survey of Protestants in the Republic* (Dublin: Irish Times 1965); Jack White, *Minority Report: The Protestant community in the Irish Republic* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975); Kurt Bowen, *Protestants in a Catholic State: Ireland's Privileged Minority* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983); Colin Murphy and Lynne Adair (eds.) *Untold Stories: Protestants in the Republic of Ireland, 1922-2002* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2002); Heather Crawford, *Outside the Glow: Protestants and Irishness in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2010); Brian Walker *A History of the Two Irelands: From Partition to Peace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Robin Bury, *Buried Lives: The Protestants of Southern Ireland* (Dublin: History Press, 2016).

² See for instance, Ian d'Alton, 'Journeying into a Wider World? The development of the histories of the Church of Ireland since 1950', in M. Empey, A. Ford and M. Moffitt (eds), *The Church of Ireland and its Past: history, interpretation and identity* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2017), pp. 220-236.

³ Dennis Kennedy, *The Widening Gulf: Northern Attitudes to the Independent Irish State, 1919-49* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1988); Brian Walker *passim*.

⁴ Census 2016 Summary Results - Part 1 (Section 8)

⁵ Census 2011 – Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers (Table 5)

⁶ As in the Irish case, the focus is on the historic Protestant population. Estimating its size is also difficult. The French state does not keep religious statistics and estimates are based on surveys. The most recent IPSOS survey (2017) gives a figure of 3.1%. See 'Sondage : les protestants français, 500 ans après la Réforme' *Réforme*, 11 décembre, 2017. Cabanel gives a figure of 2% for the historic Protestant population, in Patrick Cabanel, *Les Protestants et la République: De 1870 à nos jours* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 2000), pp. 18-20.

⁷ Bowen, *passim*.

⁸ Bury, *passim*.

⁹ Bury, *passim*.

¹⁰ See the essays in Murphy and Adair, *passim*, and Stephen Mennell, et al. 'Protestants in a Catholic state - A silent minority in Ireland', in Tom Inglis (ed.), *Religion and Politics: East-West Contrasts from Contemporary Europe* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2000), pp. 68-92.

¹¹ Peter Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916-23* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 240, 246. In a 1996 publication dealing with the killings, Hart evoked the 'ethnic cleansing' of the twentieth century. He later (2003) distanced himself from the argument.

¹² In Hart's words, 'In the end, however, the fact of the victims' religion is inescapable. These men were shot because they were Protestant', *The IRA at War*, p. 288.

¹³ For example, Eoghan Harris, 'The Continuity of the IRA and Bodies buried in Bogs', *Sunday Independent*, 10 November 2013.

¹⁴ Gerard Murphy, *The Year of Disappearances: Political Killings in Cork 1920-22* (Dublin : Gill and Macmillan, 2010); RTE Press Centre, Hidden History: The Killings At Coolacrease. 23 October 2007, at <https://presspack.rte.ie/2007/10/23/hidden-history-the-killings-at-coolacrease/>. (accessed????).

¹⁵ See John M. Regan, 'The Bandon Valley Massacre as a Historical Problem', *History*, vol. 97, no. 325, 2012, pp. 70-98; Niall Meehan, 'Examining Peter Hart', *Field Day Review*, Vol. 10 (2014), pp. 102-147; P. Heaney, P. Muldowney, P O'Connor, *Coolacrease: The True Story of the Pearson Executions—An Incident in the Irish War of Independence* (Aubane: Aubane Historical Society, 2008).

¹⁶ John A. Murphy, 'Reform ignores the realities of history', *Sunday Independent*, 10 October 2004, and 'There was no Kristellnacht on the South Mall', *Irish Examiner*, November 10, 2010. The South Mall in the centre of Cork city contained the offices of wealthy Protestant professionals.

¹⁷ Demography is never wholly predictable. Irish reunification in the future might well see the movement of northern Protestants southwards in a reversal of the trend of the early part of the 20th century.

¹⁸ The term is Ian d'Alton's. See Ian d'Alton, 'Religion as Identity', in J. Hill and M. A. Lyons, *Representing Irish Religious Histories: historiography, ideology and practice* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 205.

¹⁹ For a comparative overview of the two cases, see Joseph Ruane, 'Majority-minority Conflicts and their Resolution: Protestant Minorities in France and in Ireland', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, vol. 12, nos 3-4, 2006, pp. 509-532.

²⁰ Mack Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²¹ Cabanel *passim*, p. 18.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Chapters 44-45, John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France: Volume 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) offer an excellent overview.

²⁴ See Patrick Cabanel *La Tour de Constance et le Chambon-sur-Lignon : L'oubli et le royaume* (Cahors: La Louve, 2007).

²⁵ André Encrevé, 'French Protestants', in Rainer Liedtke and Stephan Wendehorst (eds), *The Emancipation of Catholics, Jews and Protestants: Minorities and the Nation State in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 56-82.

²⁶ Mireille Gueissaz 'Protestants et laïques d'origine protestante dans la Loi de 1905', *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, vol. 78, no. 1, pp. 16-26.

²⁷ P. Joutard, P. (1997) 'Le musée du désert: la minorité réformée', in P. Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 2653-2677. For a comparison with Irish Protestants, see Joseph Ruane, 'Ethnicity, Religion and Peoplehood: Protestants in France and in Ireland', *Ethnopolitics*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2009, pp. 121-135.

²⁸ J. Baubérot and V. Zuber, *Une Haine Oubliée: L'antiprotestantisme avant le 'Pacte Laïque' (1870-1905)*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000); for the long history of the Catholic/French identity entanglement, see Joseph F. Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever: Religious and National Identity in Modern France* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2005).

²⁹ Many of these observations are based on interviews in the department of the Gard, a religiously mixed region in the south of France with a history of conflict. See Joseph Ruane, 'After Conflict: Protestant Identity in the Gard today', in P. Bénédicte, H. Daussy and P.-O. Léchet (eds), *L'identité huguenote. Faire mémoire et écrire l'histoire XVIe-XXIe siècle* (Paris: Droz, 2014).

³⁰ Jean Baubérot, *Le Protestantisme: Doit-il Mourir?* (Paris: Seuil, 1988); Jean-Paul Willaime, *La Précarité Protestante* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1992).

³¹ For a recent addition, see Patrick Cabanel, *Le Protestantisme Français: La Belle Histoire, XVIe-XXIe* (Nîmes Editions Alcide, 2017)

³² Discours d'Emmanuel Macron à l'occasion du 500^{ème} anniversaire de la Réforme protestante. Hôtel de Ville de Paris, 22 September 2017. <http://www.elysee.fr/videos/new-video-66/> (visited 30.05.2018)

³³ '2018: Vingt protestants s'adressent à Emmanuel Macron', *Réforme*, 23 janvier 2018.

³⁴ For example, Heather Jones, 'Church of Ireland Great War remembrance in the South of Ireland: Personal reflections', in John Horne and Edward Madigan (eds) *Towards Commemoration: Ireland in War and Revolution 1912-1923* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy), pp. 74-82.

³⁵ The quarterly *Crane Bag* (1979-88), edited by Richard Kearney and Mark Patrick Hederman, set it in motion.

³⁶ Jacqueline Hill, 'Popery and Protestantism, civil and religious liberty: the disputed lessons of Irish history, 1690-1812', *Past and Present*, 118, 1988, pp. 96-129.

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- ³⁷ D. George Boyce, *Ireland 1828-1923: From Ascendancy to Democracy* (London: Wiley, 1992).
- ³⁸ See Gerard Hogan, 'A Fresh Look at "Tilson's" Case', *Irish Jurist* 33, 1998, pp. 311-332; David Jameson, 'The Religious Upbringing of Children in "Mixed Marriages": The Evolution of Irish Law', *New Hibernia Review*, 18, 2, 2014, 65-83; Ian d'Alton, 'Navigating the Minefield: How *The Irish Times* and the *Church of Ireland Gazette* Approached the Tilson Case and the Dogma of the Assumption in 1950', unpublished paper read at the Church of Ireland Historical Society, 7 November 2015.
- ³⁹ This comes across clearly in the essays in Murphy and Adair *passim*.
- ⁴⁰ See Ian d'Alton, ' "A Vestigial Population"? Perspectives on Southern Irish Protestants in the Twentieth Century', *Éire-Ireland*, 44: 3 & 4, 2009, pp. 9-42.
- ⁴¹ Anne Dolan, 'Politics, economy and society in the Irish Free State, 1922-1939', in T. Bartlett (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, Volume 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 323-348.
- ⁴² See J. H. Goldthorpe and C. T. Whelan (eds.) *The Development of Industrial Society in Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press OUP 1993); A. F. Heath, R. Breen, and C. T. Whelan (eds.) *Ireland North and South: Perspectives from Social Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- ⁴³ Compare the tone of Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial 2004) with that of the writings of (say) Desmond Fennell, Fintan O'Toole, Tom Garvin.
- ⁴⁴ The first phase of the process is well described in Bowen, *Protestants in a Catholic State* (note 2).
- ⁴⁵ See the account in Michael Smurfit, *A Life Worth Living: The Autobiography* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 2014).
- ⁴⁶ See note 30.
- ⁴⁷ There are parallels in the identity preoccupations of French Protestants and Irish Catholics rooted in their common history of displacement and marginalisation. For a four-way comparison (French Protestant, French Catholic, Irish Protestant, Irish Catholic), see Joseph Ruane 'Comparing Protestant-Catholic conflict in France and Ireland: The significance of the ethnic and colonial dimension' In: John Wolfe, (ed.) *Irish Religious Conflict in Comparative Perspective*. (London: Palgrave MacMillan) pp. 146-166.
- ⁴⁸ Irish Catholics once had a heroic narrative, but it struggles in the face of revisionist critique. There has been no corresponding critique of the French Protestant heroic narrative.