

Questions for Bishop Colton

Protestants on Sectarianism during the War of Independence

As most readers will know, the academic writing of Irish history has in recent decades has been written in a framework set by Professor David Fitzpatrick and his star pupil, Professor Peter Hart. This equated the War of Independence with a sectarian war conducted by Catholics against Protestants, simply because they were Protestants. The current Protestant Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Paul Colton, has claimed that he is scared of a repetition of this sectarianism in the coming years that might be precipitated by the commemorations planned to commemorate the war.

"A leading bishop has told how the Church of Ireland community in the Irish Republic is fearful of the upcoming centenaries of the War of Independence and the Civil War amid concerns they could re-open old sectarian divisions...Among some in our Church of Ireland community, the commemorations are anticipated fearfully and with a certain dread. Dr. Colton said it is vital that, for any understanding of the era, the human stories need to be fully told" (Belfast Telegraph, 11.9.17).

The human stories do indeed need to be told and Bishop Colton might consider what his co-religionists had to say about sectarianism before and during the War of Independence. With all due respect to the Bishop I would suggest that they were in a better position to know about the real situation than the Bishop is a century later.

The following are extracts from the *Irish Bulletin* relevant to this matter. The fact is that accusations of sectarianism by Catholics against Protestants was an integral part of the British propaganda campaign against Irish independence and the *Bulletin* published statements by representative Protestants to counter it:-

"We publish below a selection of these statements, of which there have been so many that it is impossible to reprint them all. We give, first, general statements dealing with all Ireland, then statements referring to the provinces, and, lastly, declarations made in various counties. The majority of the quotations are taken from the columns of the "Irish Times", the organ of the Protestant minority in the South and West of Ireland.

All Ireland.

On June 7th, 1920, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland said:-

"It is a notable fact that nowhere has a hand been raised against one of our isolated Church buildings, nor against a single individual Presbyterian in the South and West." and on June 6th, 1921, the Moderator repeated almost verbatim this declaration.

On June 9th, 1920, Mr. George Russell (A.E.), who was a member of the Irish Convention of 1917, wrote in the "Freeman's Journal:

"I as an Irish Protestant and an Ulsterman by birth have lived in Southern Ireland most of my life. I have worked in every county and I have never found my religion to make any barrier between myself and my Catholic countrymen, nor was my religion a bar to my work; and in that ill-fated Irish Convention one Southern Protestant Unionist after another

rose up to say they did not fear persecution from their nationalist and Catholic countrymen."

On June 17th, 1920, at Hull a conference of the representatives of the British Wesleyan Methodist Churches was held, at which the Irish representative said:-

"As far as I know in a country place in Ireland there has never been any interference good, bad or indifferent, with the worship of Methodists. The courtesy and kindness shown to your representative in Ireland is more than tongue can tell."

The Provinces.

A "Southern Protestant" writing to the "Irish Times" of July 16th, 1920, speaking of the Province of Munster, said:-

"Having been a resident in the South of Ireland for nearly thirty years, I can truly say that never once in that period have I ever received anything but the greatest possible courtesy from all classes and creeds in the South. I think that this fact cannot be too widely known in these days of stress. One would imagine from the speeches of Sir Edward Carson in the North that we in the South, because of the differences in our religions, were at one another's throats. No greater mistake was ever made."

On July 19th a similar statement was made in a letter to the "Irish Times" by a "Western Protestant", and on the 23rd in the same paper one of His Britannic Majesty's Deputy Lieutenants in the Province of Connaught wrote:-

"Sir:- I am a Protestant and have lived most of my life in the West of Ireland. During this long period I have enjoyed the friendship of my Catholic neighbours. Never has a hostile word been said to me or to any of my friends by reason of our religion. We never hesitated to ask our brother Catholics to do us a favour or oblige us in any emergency, and on every occasion there was a very ready response."

On July 29th, 1920, a "Midland Protestant" wrote to the "Irish Times":-

"We are only a mere handful but have been living quietly among our Sinn Fein neighbours and have had striking evidence of the protection of the powers that be (Republican authorities) in our lawful undertakings."

The Counties.

Dublin. (Protestants: 26% city population; 15% county population).

Mr. Denham Osborne, writing in the "Irish Times" of July 23rd, 1920, said:-

"Southern ministers of the Presbyterian Church have repeatedly made public their testimony to the kindly relations existing between the surrounding community and the members of their congregations. This was done by the Moderator of the General Assembly, a Southern minister, at the recent meeting at Belfast. It was done by the Moderator of the Synod of Dublin, the Minister of Waterford, in April last. It was done also by the Convenor of the Irish Mission, a Dublin minister, and other speakers during the Assembly meetings. If I may refer to myself, I have repeatedly repudiated in public this charge of intolerance. Fellow-Churchmen of mine have done the same; and many of them, like myself, have given scores of years of service to our Church in Southern Ireland."

A County Dublin Unionist in the "Irish Times" of August 4th, 1920, said:-

"As there are numerous letters in your paper from Unionists from almost all of the twenty-six counties, testifying to the cordial good-will existing between all Protestants and Roman

Catholics in every phase of life I wish to endorse their sentiment having lived happily and unitedly with all Roman Catholic workers, neighbours and friends."

Cork County. (Protestants: 8.55%).

Mr. J.W. Biggs, writing from Bantry, Co. Cork, on July 22nd, 1920, said:-

"I feel it my duty to protest very strongly against this unfounded slander (of intolerance on the part) of our Catholic neighbours, and in so doing, I am expressing the feelings of very many Protestant traders in West Cork. I have been resident in Bantry for forty-three years, during thirty-three of which I have been engaged in business, and I have received the greatest kindness, courtesy, and support from all classes and creeds in the country. In Munster, where Catholics outnumber Protestants by thirteen to one a large number of the leading traders are Protestants, who are being supported by Catholics and the greatest goodwill exists between them."

Mr. W.J. Verlin, Solicitor, Youghal, Co. Cork, writing on September 20th, 1920, to Rev. M. Ahern, local Catholic Curate, said:-

"I take this opportunity of expressing my sense of the kindness I have always experienced from the members of your church during my long life here."

Clare. (Protestants: 1.8%).

Mr. Eyre Ievers, writing from Mount Ievers, Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, on September 7th, 1920, says:-

"As one whose family has lived for generations in the South of Ireland, in the midst of a Catholic population, I wish to add my testimony to that of the numerous correspondents who have already expressed their sense of the good feeling existing between Protestants and Catholics in the South. Notwithstanding their small minority they have always enjoyed the fullest toleration."

Cavan. (Protestants: 18.54%).

The British Judge Brown at Manorhamilton Quarter Sessions (reported on September 27th, 1920) said

"he had never experienced anything but kindness and good-fellowship from his Catholic countrymen, some of his best and sincerest friends being amongst that number. Since he came as judge to Cavan and Leitrim he had received nothing from them but courtesy and kindly greetings."

Kerry. (Protestants: 2.74%).

Messrs Latchford and Sons, Ltd., (a Protestant firm), writing from Tralee, Co. Kerry, in the Press of September 22nd, 1920, said:-

"For three generations we have transacted our business throughout the South of Ireland and never otherwise than under the friendliest relations. The kindness and patronage we have received from our Catholic neighbours is sufficient answer to the question of intolerance."

Kildare. (Protestants: 17.39%).

At the select vestry of Naas and Killashee, Co. Kildare, held in the first week of September, 1920, presided over by Canon Clover, resolutions were passed on the motion of Mr. G. Wolfe, seconded by Col. R. St. Leger Moore, C.B., deploring the acts of

religious intolerance such as those at Belfast and adding: "We shall endeavour to foster the good feeling amongst our neighbours of different religious beliefs which has always existed between us in the past."

Kilkenny. (Protestants: 5.03%).

Very Rev. Dean Winder, M.A., of Kilkenny, speaking to the Catholic members of the local Technical Committee on July 13th, 1920, said:-

"You need not tell me that you are tolerant in Kilkenny. I have received nothing but kindness, consideration and goodwill since I came here and I can never be thankful enough to the Kilkenny people."

A declaration signed by the head of every Protestant family in the United parishes of Fiddown, Castlane and Clonmore, Co. Kilkenny, including Canon R.M. Kellett, Major Max Bollam, Major E.W. Briscoe, Col. W.H. Wyndham Quin, etc., was published in the Press of September 20th, 1920. The Declaration said:-

"We desire to give public expression to our appreciation of the unfailing good fellowship which at present exists, has always existed and we believe will continue to exist between ourselves and our Catholic neighbours."

Galway. (Protestants: 2.36%).

Rev. W.P. Young, speaking at the General Assembly, Belfast, on June 10th, 1921, said: "I have never met with the slightest discourtesy from any individual in the matter of my worship."

Rev. J.C. Trotter, writing in the "Irish Times" from Ardahan Rectory, Co. Galway, on July 20th, 1920, said:

"During my experience of over thirty years in the Co. Galway I have not only never had the slightest disrespect shown to me or to those belonging to me as Protestants, but from priests and people, gentle and simple, have received the utmost courtesy, consideration and friendship which I esteem very highly. As to the Roman Catholic farmers about, I have known them to come to my help during seed-time or harvest, even to the neglect of their own crops."

Leitrim. (Protestants: 8.53%).

At a meeting of the Protestant inhabitants of Annaduff held in Dromod, Co. Leitrim, in the first week of September, 1920, resolutions were passed asking the Protestants of Belfast to adopt a more friendly attitude to the Catholic minority and testifying that "no Protestant in the parish has been interfered with on account of his religion."

Leix. (Late Queen's County). (Protestants: 11.26%).

On July 21st, 1920, a Protestant in Leix wrote to the "Irish Times" on the question of Catholic Toleration:-

"In spite of all the changes of these last years I see no difference in the old friendly courtesy and kindness that I have known all my life unless, indeed, that sometimes they are greater."

Limerick. (Protestants: 2.92%).

The Very Rev. R.S. Ross Lewin, Protestant Archdeacon of Limerick, writing to the Press on September 15th, 1920, said that for six generations his people had been in Co. Clare

and had always been on the best of terms with their Catholic neighbours. His predecessor, Rev. A. Armstrong, who was a rector in Tipperary, had lived for forty years in that county loved by all sections of the community.

"The tolerant treatment received at all times" from their Catholic neighbours was mentioned in a resolution passed by the Rathkeale and Nanten Select Vestry, Co. Limerick, reported in the Press of September 20th, 1920.

Longford. (Protestants: 8.04%).

Granard (Co. Longford) Select Vestry passed a resolution (reported in the Press of September 8th, 1920) condemning

"the conduct of Belfastmen in introducing religious persecution into the troubles of our unhappy country" and adding: "We desire to disassociate ourselves from their actions which have neither our approval nor our sympathy and we would like our feelings made known to our neighbours with whom we have always lived on the friendliest terms."

At Mostrim, Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, prominent Protestant residents published a resolution, reported on September 20th, 1920, expressing appreciation of the goodwill shown to them by the Catholic majority.

Louth. (Protestants: 8.42%).

On August 31st, 1920, at Dundalk, a public meeting of the Protestants of Co. Louth was held to protest against the destruction of the homes of Catholics at Belfast. Rev. Mr. Joynt said he has spent four years in Co. Cork and lived happily there with everyone in the community. Mr. A. Coulter said:-

"The first message we ought to send to the North of Ireland is that it is possible – and has been in my life-time in the town of Dundalk accomplished – that Catholics and Protestants can live together as men and not as beasts."

Mayo. (Protestants: 2.14%).

At a meeting of Protestants in Castlebar, Co. Mayo (reported in the Dublin Press of September 2nd, 1920), over which Rev. J.A. Lendrum, Rector, Castlebar presided, many tributes were paid to the toleration the Protestants had experienced. Mr. Dixon said he had lived with the people of Mayo for twenty-seven years and at no time did the fact that he was a Protestant embarrass him officially or otherwise. Mr. A.C. Larminie said that as a Unionist he had received at all times every consideration and courtesy. His political views were known but that fact did not debar him from being elected year after year on the various local bodies in Caselebar.

Meath. (Protestants: 6.81%).

On August 23rd, 1920, Sir Nugent Everard, Bart., His Britannic Majesty's Lieutenant for the County of Meath, and the Right Rev. the Protestant Bishop of Meath, wrote to the "Irish Times":-

"We bear witness from our own experience of the happy relationships in both commercial and social life that exists in the County of Meath between our Roman Catholic neighbours and ourselves who represent only 5% of the total population."

Monaghan. (Protestants: 25.32%).

A specially convened meeting of the Carrickmacross Select Vestry, presided over by Rev. T.A. Watson, M.A., was held in September 1920 (see Press of September 8th). A resolution proposed by Captain E.C. Shirley, seconded by Mr. J. Watherington, J.P., and passed, declared:-

"We wish to place on record that the relationship in this district existing between the Catholic majority and the Protestant minority has always been of the most friendly and amicable nature."

Roscommon. (Protestants: 2.37%).

On July 19th, 1920, the "Irish Times" published a letter from a Protestant in Roscommon, in which he said:-

"I have been resident in and travelled the West of Ireland for over twenty-five years and have received nothing but kindness all round."

Tipperary. (Protestants: 5.43%).

The Select Vestry at Fethard, Co. Tipperary, at which were present Rev. R.C. Patten; Col. Cooke, O.B.E.; Major General R.O. Kellett, C.B., C.M.G., D.L.; Captain E.C. Morel, etc. adopted a resolution condemning

"in the strongest possible manner the action of our co-religionists in the North of Ireland in cruelly driving from their homes and their employment their Catholic fellow-workers and countrymen, and we hereby testify our appreciation of the kindly relationship that has always existed and now exists between the different religious denominations in our neighbourhood."

Similar resolutions were passed at meetings of the Select Vestries in other parts of the County.

Waterford. (Protestants: 7.77%).

Mr. B.G. Ussher, High Sheriff of the City of Waterford, writing to the "Irish Times" of November 6th, 1920, sent the following statement for publication as expressing the views of the Protestants of Co. Waterford:-

"In view of the fact that a widespread belief is still encouraged by a portion of the Press (in spite of testimony to the contrary) to the effect that Irishmen are incapable of mutual toleration and goodwill, we declare on behalf of the Protestants of the County that religious persecution has always been unknown amongst us here and that we lie in peace and harmony with our Roman Catholic countrymen."

Westmeath. (Protestants: 8.68%).

Rev. A. Drought, Protestant Rector at Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath, and Messrs. W.A. Wilson and M.C. Webb, synodsmen, addressed a letter (published on September 14th, 1920) to the Rev. J. Giles, Catholic Curate, stating:-

"We are glad to state, and we believe we speak for every Protestant in this district, that we are living in the midst of a large Roman Catholic population and that we are, and have been, at all times treated with the greatest courtesy, kindness and toleration by our Roman Catholic neighbours."

Wexford. (Protestants: 7.69%).

Rev. W.H.T. Gahan, Protestant Rector of Gorey, Co. Wexford, in a letter to the "Irish Times" on July 26th, 1920, said:-

"I may say that having spent a ministry of fifteen years in the Midlands and South of Ireland I cannot remember a single instance of anything but kindness, consideration and tolerance from my Roman Catholic friends and neighbours . . . I may add that during recent months, when I have come in contact with many of our clergy I have not heard a single complaint of religious intolerance or hostility . . . We dwell, - a helpless minority - in safety and friendly confidence among our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen."

Wicklow. (Protestants: 20.94%).

The Press of September 20th, 1920, reported a meeting of the Blessington (Co. Wicklow) Select Vestry, at which "the very cordial relations which existed between Catholics and Protestants in this county" was recorded with appreciation.

Rev. T.J. McCord, the Manse, Tinahely, Co. Wicklow, wrote to the Press of September 15th that having resided in five Northern and three Southern counties he invariably found that "The vast majority of every creed live in friendship and mutual helpfulness."

(Volume 6, No. 4. Irish Bulletin, 25th October, 1921.)

In a later issue the Bulletin published more of these statements.

"In the IRISH BULLETIN of October 25th, 1921, we published a long series of statements by leading Protestants in all parts of Republican Ireland, in which the complete absence of intolerance on the part of the overwhelming Catholic majority towards their Protestant fellow-countrymen was generously acknowledged.

Since that issue of the IRISH BULLETIN was published many similar statements have appeared in the "Irish Times", the organ of the Southern Unionists.

The Sense of Justice of the Majority.

Mr. Beverley G. Ussher of Cappagh, Co. Waterford, in a letter to the "Irish Times" of October 26th commented upon the appeal made by certain Protestant Bishops in Ireland to the British Prime Minister for the insertion of "safeguards" for the Southern Unionists in any settlement come to at the London Conference. Mr. Ussher said:-

"It has been the constant mistake of Irish minorities, when in trouble, to lean upon English support, as the Israelites, though warned by the prophet, leaned upon the Pharaoh, King of Egypt. Would it not be wiser to place reliance upon the good-will and sense of justice of our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen, who, at a time of extraordinary political bitterness, have shown that they are not actuated by any desire to disturb the harmony of our religious communions which, in the recent history of this country outside of Ulster, has proved a source of national strength and stability."

"Our Hope lies in Unity."

The Right Rev. Dr. Dowse, Protestant Bishop, speaking on October 26th, 1921, at a meeting of the Synod of the United Diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, said:-

"We thankfully recognise that throughout our diocese so much Churchmen and Roman Catholics live side by side on terms of friendship and good-will. As we look but into the future, we have grounds for hope. We have never desired a change of rulers. But if change

must come, then, whatever be the form of government established in the future, and under which we must live, we believe, without any conceit or pride, that the contribution we can bring will be necessary if our country is to reach its highest level . . . We want to know that we shall be able to attain whatever position in the State our talents and abilities fit us for, without suffering any disability, either because of our religion or of our politics. We are glad to hear so many assurances from the dominant party in Ireland that these are the principles on which they desire that the civil and political life of the country will be conducted . . . None of us want partition. We are too small for it. Our hope lies in unity .."

"A Fair Chance as we have been given in the Past."

The Right Rev. Dr. Day, Protestant Bishop of Ossory, speaking at a meeting of the Diocesan Synod in Kilkenny, said on October 25th, 1921:-

"The members of our Church in the South of Ireland are but a minority of the population. In some parts they are very few and scattered. But they are real Irishmen, with just as strong and patriotic a love for their country as any other portion of the community. They have a big stake in the country and a real contribution to make to its welfare; and they want some kind of assurance that they will be allowed to live in peace and quietness where their forefathers have lived for centuries before them. That is all they ask. They ask no favour and no preferential treatment. They only ask to be given a fair chance, as they have been given it in the past, and to be allowed to use their brains and their energies for their own livelihood and for the good of the country in general."

"Trustfully we await the Outcome."

The Right Rev. Dr. Sterling Berry, Protestant Bishop, speaking at the Clonfert and Kilmacduagh Synod at Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, on October 25th, 1921, said:-

"To attempt to solve national problems by a resort to force is as irrational as it is certain to be unsuccessful. Coercion can restrain outward manifestations of ill-will, but coercion can never win the hearts of the coerced – nay, it only serves to deepen animosity and to accentuate bad feeling.

"Anxiously but trustfully we await the outcome of what is now taking place. Confidently we anticipate the coming in the near future of a settlement that will bind Great Britain and Ireland into a union which no Act of Parliament could ever bring about.

"And if the settlement comes, what is our attitude to be to the new order of government in this land? . . . Most earnestly I would plead for loyal support of the new order of government that would follow a settlement and for hearty co-operation to the utmost of our power . . . I do not share," his Lordship added, "the views of those who are already forecasting for us troublous times in this part of the country."

"Proofs of Toleration in Sinn Fein, Dail Eireann and the Peace Conference."

Mr. Henry J. Walker, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, writing under date of October 21st, 1921, to the "Irish Times" says:-

"Always excepting some inhabitants of a limited area in North-East Ulster, few Irishmen will quarrel with Dr. Gregg's (Protestant Archbishop of Dublin) exposition of the rights of minorities . . . Dr. Gregg has, no doubt, in mind the practical proof of sympathy given by Mr. de Valera, whose hearty support of proportional representation evidenced a devotion to principle not common amongst politicians . . . Sinn Fein, as the majority, not standing to benefit by the change, but quite otherwise. And he, doubtless, contrasts this

disinterested action with the very different course pursued on that occasion by the Belfast political guides.

"The Archbishop also recollects that, during the long history of the national movement in Ireland, the leaders whom the people most delighted to honour living, and whose memories are held in most tender affection, belonged to the religion of the minority. He knows that the favourite political teacher of Irish Nationalists is the Protestant Thomas Davis, whose doctrine was summed up in the Words:-

"Start not, Irish-born man;
If you're to Ireland true,
We heed not class nor creed nor clan,
We've hearts and hands for you.'

And the Archbishop reflects with well-founded certitude that the religion of Emmet, of Mitchel, and of Parnell will not suffer persecution in Ireland. As an eminent Irish priest and patriot, the late Monsignor Kelly, said on a memorable occasion, 'The Irish Protestant patriots are the canonised saints of Irish nationality.'

"Dr. Gregg has also, one may feel sure, noted with pleasure that in the Ministry of Dail Eireann (though but a small body in number) there are two of his own religion, and that among the representatives of our people at the present Conference there is a distinguished Irish Protestant while both secretaries to the Irish Delegation are of that faith."

(Volume 6, No. 12. Irish Bulletin, 4TH November, 1921.)

Several other, similar, statements were made at the time. Bishop Colton needs to tell us whether he believes what his co-religionists, and a direct predecessor, have said: and, if not, why not? If he does not believe them, then he is effectively saying that all these people were liars, hypocrites, cowards or worse. And if this sectarianism did not exist a century ago, how could it possibly emerge today? Indeed, if there were such a danger, what is he doing to counter it? Is he not, in effect, stirring it up?

There are excuses made for Professor Hart these days, such as that he did not have sufficient information for his sectarian thesis. Dr. Bielenberg of UCC told the West Cork History Festival last year that he and his colleagues "*had gathered a wider range of information than was available to Dr Hart and therefore had a more rounded picture*" (30.7.2017).

However the information I have quoted from the *Irish Bulletin* has been available for nearly one hundred years. Professor Hart, as a most industrious researcher, cannot have missed it. The *Irish Bulletin* was the official daily paper of the Government of the Irish Republic—and it was the attempt to destroy that Republic which the war was all about. The *Bulletin* could be classified as a primary source—in fact the primary source about that War. Yet, in the book that made him famous, Professor Hart did not even acknowledge the *Bulletin* as a source or list it in his bibliography. It is inconceivable that he did not know of it—yet he ignored it! And if he did miss the *Bulletin*, he could hardly have missed so much material in the *Irish Times*!

Hart's methodology was simply that of His Master's Voice—to ignore the evidence that did not fit the narrative that he and Professor Fitzpatrick were creating. Such is the

template for Irish academic history today—rotten to the core. It is a pity that Bishop Colton has joined his voice to that crew.

Jack Lane

IRISH BULLETIN

a full reprint of the official daily newspaper of Dáil Éireann, giving news and war reports

Volumes 1-4

12 July 1919 - 1 January 1921
(more volumes in preparation)

Orders to

<https://www.atholbooks-sales.org>