



Orangemen on parade at Rossnowlagh, Co Donegal.

Descendancy : the decline of Irish Protestantism

This important book examines the roots of sectarianism in the context of the declining Protestant population, who formed a 'non-ascendancy' quite separate from the landed Anglican elite

Irish Times - Over the past years the southern Protestant experience of war and revolution has inspired a substantial number of books, articles and RTÉ documentaries, as well as a lively

debate in the press. To a large extent this interest was pioneered by [David Fitzpatrick](#) and some of his research students. *Descendancy* represents Fitzpatrick's latest contribution to such debate, and covers key aspects of the question.

The book consists of nine essays organised into three parts, dealing with Orangeism, the 1912 Ulster Covenant and the postwar Protestant "exodus" from the South. Despite the reference to 1795 in the title, most chapters concern 20th-century topics. Some of them revisit familiar episodes and figures through the forensic analysis of new evidence; others try to settle historiographical disputes, including those about the exodus from the Free State and "the spectre of 'ethnic cleansing' in revolutionary Ireland". (This is the title of the last chapter, which is based on the Parnell Lecture that Fitzpatrick, who is professor of modern history at Trinity College Dublin, gave at the University of Cambridge in 2013.)

Some of these essays are previously unpublished; others have appeared in scholarly journals. Both historians and the general public will be delighted that they are now readily accessible in book format (especially if

Cambridge University Press produces a cheaper paperback edition).

The title alludes to the end of the Ascendancy, but Fitzpatrick is not interested here in the Anglican landed elite: instead *Descendancy* is largely about the middle class – farmers, solicitors, shopkeepers – particularly its Methodist manifestation.

Socially, these people were part of a “non-ascendancy”, and some actually benefited from the initial stages of the crisis of the old elite, particularly through the Land Purchase Acts (1885-1903). Yet they were committed to the preservation of the Union and in this sense were associated with the political (rather than the social and economic) decline of the old order. Hence they too experienced a descendancy, a marginalisation in the post-1922, predominantly Catholic State.

Well-chosen case studies

Fitzpatrick combines the sophisticated analysis of qualitative sources with an elegant handling of quantitative data. He dissects complex and ambiguous evidence with thoroughness, clarity and empathy. Each chapter is a case study, mapping out the mental and social contours of

the Protestant crisis of self-confidence, from the origins of the Orange military traditions to WB Yeats's and Louis MacNeice's personal and familial relationship with "sectarianism".

The latter is the book's central theme, which Fitzpatrick explores first through four essays on aspects of Orangeism, then by reassessing the causes of southern Protestant depopulation from the 1920s. Such problem is tested and examined through two magisterial chapters that focus on the specific case of the Methodists.

His somewhat startling conclusion is that Protestant demographic decline had little to do with violence, the threat of violence or other forms of sectarian behaviour by the Catholic majority. This may work for the Methodists, but Fitzpatrick does not convincingly establish whether their experience was representative of the Protestant community as a whole.

Methodists were a small minority within the minority. Unlike the Church of Ireland, with its territorial presence and political profile, they were not in the front line of intercommunal relations. Working with evidence from both Anglican and "nonconformist" communities, other scholars (including, most recently, Andy

Bielenberg and Brian Walker) reach different conclusions. Bielenberg's estimate that at least 16 per cent of the Protestant demographic decline was due to "involuntary" emigration remains all too plausible, but even he does not account fully for the grey area between involuntary migration caused by well-attested persecution, on the one hand, and migration caused by softer forms of community pressure, on the other. As Miriam Moffitt and others have shown, low-intensity intimidation could be very effective in scaring away Protestant families, even when it was not necessarily or ostensibly inspired by sectarianism.

Book Title: Descendancy. Irish Protestant Histories since 1795.
ISBN-13: 978-1-107-08093-5. **Publisher:** Cambridge University Press **Guideline Price:** £65.0

More at -

<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/descendancy-review-the-decline-of-irish-protestantism-1.2094000>

Dubs jilt church weddings - the county you live in can impact your marriage plans

Where you're from can influence everything from what age you'll get married to how you'll celebrate your big day

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Irish Mirror -Civil weddings are now the top choice for couples tying the knot in Dublin, irishmirror.ie can reveal.

Exclusive analysis of the latest CSO data on marriages and civil partnerships reveals almost half (46%) of weddings in Dublin in 2013 were civil ceremonies, while just 42% took place in a Catholic church.

Civil ceremonies make up 26% of wedding ceremonies nationally - but Dublin is the first county where they now outnumber traditional Catholic services.

Cavan has the second highest percentage of civil weddings at 39%, while in Sligo 34% of marriages in 2013 were civil ceremonies.

However, traditional Catholic weddings still dominate outside Dublin.

Clare tops the list with a massive 92% of all ceremonies taking place in Catholic churches.

Mayo is next at 86%, followed by Leitrim where 83% of couples in 2013 said their vows in a Catholic church.

Other denominations

Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and other denominations made up just 8% of Irish wedding ceremonies in 2013.

Overall, Monaghan had the highest percentage of Church of Ireland and Presbyterian weddings at 6% and 3% respectively.

Presbyterian ceremonies also made up 3% of marriages in Donegal.

Meath had the highest percentage of wedding ceremonies for other denominations at 15%, followed by Wicklow at 13%, Kildare at 12% and Dublin at 10%.

Only Catholic and civil marriages took place in Roscommon with no Church of Ireland, Presbyterian or weddings of other denominations in 2013.

Demand for non-religious weddings is exploding with the number of humanist ceremonies almost quadrupling from 209 in 2013 to more than 750 last year.

Stats also reveal that the proportion of same sex civil partnerships in Dublin was almost six times the national average in 2013.

There were 213 civil partnerships in the capital in 2013 - a rate of 17 per 100,000 - compared with just 3 per 100,000 nationally.

Clare, Cork, Kildare and Mayo were next with 5 civil partnerships each per 100,000.

There were no civil partnerships in Cavan, Leitrim, Longford, Monaghan, Offaly or Sligo.

Male civil partnerships made up 62% of all ceremonies nationally, however, there were more female than male partnerships in Wicklow (83%), Limerick (73%), Mayo (67%) and Kerry (67%).

There were no male partnerships in Laois and Tipperary, and no female partnerships in Carlow, Donegal and Roscommon.

More at -

<http://www.irishmirror.ie/female/sex-relationships/dubs-jilt-church-weddings-reveal-5120787>

Methodist Belfast mission's Kirk House Wins Prestigious Dementia Award



Staff at Kirk House have won a prestigious award which recognises their expertise in

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dementia care. Kirk House won the 'Staff Team of the Year' Award on 4th February at the Dementia Services Development Centre (DSDC) NI Dementia Achievement Awards at the Europa Hotel which recognise organisations and individuals who have worked to improve the quality of life for people with living dementia.

The team at Kirk House had been nominated by Shelagh McCaughan the daughter of one of the residents, who praised the care her mother receives, "My mum is resident in 'Memory Lane' where a specialist trained, highly skilled team provide her with the highest possible standards of care. The most important thing for me is the way my mum is treated by every single member of staff throughout Kirk House - without exception they are generous, accepting, thoughtful and loving. They are also like this with residents' relatives, who are welcomed and cared for as well."

Kirk House has recently adapted part of the building into '[Memory Lane](#)', which will provide specialist care for people living with dementia. As part of the changes, the staff team at Memory Lane have completed the innovative DSDC 'Best Practice in Dementia Care' development programme, and the changes they have implemented have made great improvements to

the quality of life for residents. The Best Practice programme has been so successful that all of the staff at Kirk House are going to complete the training in order to benefit all residents.

More at - <http://www.kirkhousecarehome.co.uk/news/2015-02-06/kirk-house-wins-prestigious-dementia-award>

McAleese critical of Pope over comments on smacking children

Former President Mary McAleese has criticised Pope Francis' comments on smacking children, warning it could signal a turning back of the clock in the church's attitude to corporal punishment and children's rights.

Irish Independent - In a letter to the Irish Independent, the former professor of law at Trinity, who is currently completing a doctorate in canon law, highlights the Vatican is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Convention advocates the abolition of corporal punishment of children in all circumstances.

The mother-of-three refers to an exchange last year between the Holy See and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which claimed corporal punishment “remains widespread in some Catholic institutions” and “reached endemic levels” in Ireland as revealed by the Ryan Report.

“Is the Holy See now doing what it claimed not to be doing a year ago, namely actively and internationally promoting the corporal punishment of children,” the former President writes. “If it is, then Pope Francis has surely turned the clock back considerably.”

The UN Committee highlighted that the Vatican has not enacted guidelines banning corporal punishment of children in Catholic schools, as well as in the home.

This week, the Pope controversially recalled a conversation he had with a father who told him he sometimes hit his children.

"One time, I heard a father say, 'At times I have to hit my children a bit, but never in the face so as not to humiliate them'.

"That's great. He had a sense of dignity. He should punish, do the right thing, and then move

on," Pope Francis told an audience of thousands in St Peter's Square.

In response, Dr McAleese asks: "What faith are we to have now in the Holy See's Commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child?" She asks whether the Vatican has decided to "oppose the stated view of the Committee that the corporal punishment of children should be banned".

According to Dr McAleese, the Vatican said it would submit a thorough study in respect of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

More at -

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/news/mcaleese-critical-of-pope-over-comments-on-smacking-children-30971771.html>

What would Groucho Marx say of these Church elders?

Earlier this week, the Presbyterian Church elected the Reverend Ian McNie from Ballymoney as its Moderator-designate. He received the church's endorsement with nominations from 12 of the 19 presbyteries - Alf McCreary writes in the Belfast Telegraph

The Rev Liz Hughes from Whitehouse was runner-up with four nominations, the Rev Frank Sellar had two, and the Rev Robert Bell had one.

Last year, Ian McNie and Liz Hughes tied for second place, and some optimists hoped that it would also be close this year, but that was not to be.



Under attack: Presbyterian Church elders have been criticised for their attitudes towards women

I wish the Rev McNie well as Moderator in a challenging time for the Church in general, and it will be interesting to see how his year of office works itself out in the headlines. Certainly, he made a stir in his first Press conference.

I am also aware of the qualities of Liz Hughes, my parish minister in Whitehouse, and she would also have brought her own talents to the top post. I am disappointed for her personally, that she might turn out to be the best female Moderator that the Presbyterian Church never had, but to be runner-up twice in a row is no mean achievement.

However, my comments are not about personalities as such. I would feel the same way no matter who was involved. I am sad the Presbyterian Church has not yet elected a woman to its top post - though, in effect, that role has now become more ceremonial and administrative. I understand why the Presbyterians have not voted for a woman leader. This is because a section of the powerful male lobby does not want a female moderator.

Several years ago, the Rev Ruth Patterson, another worthy candidate, was not given a single nomination in the election for Moderator, which was a disgrace. I am not saying that someone should be elected simply because she is a woman. To do so would be wrong, but it is scarcely believable that in an age when the Methodists in Ireland, the Anglicans in Ireland and England, and Churches throughout the world, have appointed women to senior posts,

the Irish Presbyterians are still dragging their feet.

It is also a source of dismay to me that some male ministers in the Presbyterian Church are still able to bar women from preaching in their pulpits on "grounds of conscience".

More at -

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/life/what-would-groucho-marx-say-of-these-church-elders-30970828.html>

Conflict in the Congregation - Opportunity and Danger

Contemporary Christianity presents "In conversation with Joe Campbell" on February 24 at 7.30 pm in 21 Ormeau Avenue.

Many churches face the challenge of conflict. The resulting stress for both those in leadership and in the fellowship are often deep and lasting. Joe will bring his years of experience in opening up this important issue.

This will be followed by a time of discussion/questions/conversation.

Joe is a former teacher and youth worker. He spent 20 years in community relations and peace building mainly with Mediation Northern Ireland. He was profoundly influenced by spending a year on sabbatical at a Mennonite seminary in USA. Joe helped establish the Presbyterian Church's Conciliation Service and presented a report and recommendations to PCI's General Assembly in 2013 based on its experiences. From 2006 to 2010 Joe worked on peacebuilding issues with United Mission to Nepal, also working with the Nepali government's Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction.

Come and contribute to the learning, perhaps from your own experience!

info@contemporarychristianity.net

Conscience clause 'gay cake' case leads to wider debate over rights and values

The case of a controversial cake has started a debate in Northern Ireland about rights, identity and values. writes Chris Page of BBC.

For both sides, the issues go to the heart of what sort of society people want to live in.

The Equality Commission's lawsuit against Ashers Baking Company is due to be heard in the High Court in March.



The cake was ordered for an International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia event in May, and another bakery accepted the order after Ashers declined

The Christian owners of the business refused a request to bake a cake bearing a slogan in support of gay marriage.

The story has been the catalyst for the [DUP to put forward legislation](#) designed to prevent such a case happening again.

More at -

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-31155548>

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has said the DUP's religious conscience clause bill would weaken protection against discrimination for gay people.

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/warning-on-conscience-clause-bill-30968631.html>

UK anti-Semitism hit record level in 2014, report says

Anti-Semitic incidents reached a record level in the UK last year, according to the Community Security Trust.

BBC - A report by the trust, which provides security for Britain's Jewish community and monitors anti-Semitism, said the number of incidents had more than doubled to 1,168 in 2014.

It is the highest figure since the trust began monitoring in 1984.

"Anti-Semitic reactions to the conflict in Israel and Gaza" were the biggest factor behind the rise, the trust said.

It recorded 314 incidents in July - the highest ever recorded in a single month.



A far-right activist has threatened to protest against "Jewification" in Stamford Hill

It said almost half the offenders made reference to Gaza or Palestinians.

More at -

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31140919>

Anti-Semitic attacks more than double in UK -
Telegraph

www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11391156/Anti-Semitic-attacks-more-than-double-in-UK.html

Is there really a Jewish exodus from western Europe? - Guardian

February 9

www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2015/feb/05/is-there-really-a-jewish-exodus-from-western-europe