

7. The Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland from the American Revolution to the Act of Union 1776-1801

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I

The last three decades of the eighteenth century, were a period of profound constitutional and political change in Ireland and in her relationship with England.

At the end of the seventeenth century, the English settlers who had come to Ireland since the Elizabethan period seemed to have triumphed at last together with their Protestant church. The class of Catholic English landowners, the *Old English*, who were descendants of earlier English settlers, who had tried to claim if not independence, then at least a special status for Ireland among the dominions of the English King, had been almost totally destroyed. The Catholic peasantry had been subdued. Despite occasional agrarian disturbances, and the peasants' refusal to accept the officially established religion, they were of little relevance to Dublin politics - not to mention Westminster and Whitehall.¹

During the eighteenth century and in especially after 1750, the landowning and professional classes, who were to be identified from the 1780s on as the

¹ For Ireland in the eighteenth century see W. A. FROUDE, *The English in Ireland in the 18th Century*, 3 vols., London 1872-1874; W. E. H. LECKY, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 5 vols., London 1892; *A New History of Ireland*, vol. IV, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, eds. T. W. MOODY and W. E. VAUGHAN, Oxford 1986; F. G. JAMES, *Ireland in the Empire 1688-1770*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1973; R. B. MCDOWELL, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801*, Oxford 1979; D. DICKSON, *New Foundations: Ireland 1660-1800* (Helicon History of Ireland), Dublin 1987; S. J. CONNOLLY, *Religion, Law and Power. The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660-1760*, Oxford 1992, and T. BARTLETT, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation. The Catholic Question 1690-1830*, Dublin 1992.

Protestant Ascendancy,² were at the height of their power. Their political and social dominance was hardly questioned before the 1780s and 1790s and economically they benefited from Ireland's increasing prosperity. Long decades of peace - after the wars and upheavals of the seventeenth century - laid the foundations for economic growth, in particular during the second half of the eighteenth century.³

Catholics shared in the prosperity of this period only to a lesser degree. The penal laws of the early eighteenth century generally excluded them from acquiring landed property as freehold.⁴ This did not, however, affect the commercial activities of the growing class of Catholic merchants in the port towns of Ireland. Even the tenants and cottiers of rural Ireland participated to some degree in the economic prosperity of the eighteenth century. Although the smallholders who made up a large proportion of the rural population of Ireland continued to live on the edge of economic disaster, for nearly a century after 1740 there was nothing to compare with the great subsistence crises of the past. The wealthier farmers, whose numbers increased during this period, were even able to improve their situation.⁵

The remarkable demographic expansion of the later eighteenth century - Ireland's population grew from less than three millions in about 1710 to nearly five millions in about 1790⁶ - was also at least to some extent a sign of growing prosperity. After the early 1740s, harvest failures no longer resulted in immediate disaster. The growth of the domestic textile industry,

² For the definition and membership of the Protestant Ascendancy see R. F. FOSTER, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, London 1988, pp. 170-173. Cf. CONNOLLY, *Religion, Law and Power*, p. 104. Cf. further below n. 53, 54.

³ L. M. CULLEN, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, London, pp. 50 ff and 77 ff. Cf. IDEM, *Economic Development 1691-1750 and 1750-1800*, in: *New History of Ireland*, IV (above n. 1), pp. 123-158 and 159-195, and DICKSON, *Foundations* (above n. 1), pp. 96 ff.

⁴ *New History of Ireland*, IV (above n. 1), pp. 16-21; cf. BARTLETT, *Fall and Rise* (above n. 1), pp. 17 ff.

⁵ DICKSON, *Foundations* (above n. 1), pp. 113 f and 98; CULLEN, *Economic Development 1750-1800* (above n. 3), pp. 159 ff.

⁶ L. M. CULLEN, *Economic Development 1750-1800* (above n. 3), in particular p. 161.

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producing linen but also woollen cloth, was one of the factors which created a certain degree of prosperity in rural Ireland because it offered smallholders a chance to supplement from other sources the meagre income they derived from agriculture.⁷ By the end of the century, however, the growth of the population was beginning to create severe economic and social tensions in many of the more densely populated areas of the country.

After 1750, however, Ireland seemed to have achieved a state of comparative economic as well as political stability. Nevertheless, it was this very stability which contained the seeds of later conflict. It allowed the ruling Protestant élite to gain an unprecedented degree of self-confidence.⁸

Protestant Ireland seemed to be much less dependent on English political and military support than it had been in the preceding decades. It is therefore not surprising that English influence on Irish political and economic affairs was more strongly resented than in the past. This feeling of resentment gave rise to the anti-English *Patriotism* of the Ascendancy which is such an important feature of the Irish political landscape of the later eighteenth century.

Among the dominions of the English Crown Ireland had a peculiar position. Constitutionally she was not a colony in the way that the North American possessions of the Crown were colonies. The English monarchs did not govern Ireland in their capacity as Kings of England, but as Kings of Ireland.⁹

⁷ DICKSON points out, however, that the income of small tenants and rural labourers fell after 1750. Only the cultivation of potatoes instead of other crops made it possible for these groups to survive. (DICKSON, *Foundations* [above n. 1], pp. 113 f and 98).

⁸ To some extent even the Protestant middle classes shared this feeling. The new self-confidence of Protestant Ireland was no longer undermined by constant fear of a Catholic rebellion to the same extent as in the past, although such fears did survive in some parts of the country, in particular in Munster. See L. M. CULLEN, *The 1798 rebellion in its eighteenth-century context*, in: P. J. CORISH (ed.), *Radicals, Rebels, and Establishments*, Belfast 1985, 91-114, pp. 102 and 111.

⁹ J. G. BECKETT, *Anglo-Irish constitutional relations in the later eighteenth century*, in: *Irish Historical Studies* 14 (1965), pp. 20-38. For a comparison between Ireland's constitutional position and that of the American colonies cf. J. P. GREENE, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Developments in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States 1607-1788*, Athens (Ga.) 1986.

Moreover, Ireland had her own Parliament. Admittedly this Parliament did not strictly possess the legal right to initiate legislation¹⁰ and the British Parliament claimed the right - confirmed in the Declaratory Act of 1720 - to pass laws binding Ireland without the consent of the Irish Lords and Commons.¹¹ Nevertheless, the status of the Dublin Parliament was clearly different from and superior to that of the colonial assemblies.

The Lord Lieutenant who governed Ireland for the Crown, however, was not only an Englishman but also a representative of those political factions or groups which dominated the Parliament at Westminster, and he was normally a member of the British Cabinet.¹² In practice the problems created by the rather complicated political and constitutional relationship between Ireland and England were alleviated by a generous application of the same remedy which made the British constitution workable in the eighteenth century: patronage. Ireland was even more susceptible to the influence of patronage than England. Apart from the 64 representatives of the 32 Irish counties the 300 members of the Irish House of Commons were nearly all elected by constituencies with a very small number of electors. Many of these small constituencies were so firmly under the influence of a single patron that they were in effect pocket boroughs, whose representatives were virtually appointed by their owner.¹³

¹⁰ For the restrictions on the power of the Irish Parliament, in particular the late medieval *Poyning's Law* see CONNOLLY, *Religion, Law and Power* (above n. 1), pp. 34, 75, 107.

¹¹ I. VICTORY, *The Making of the 1720 Declaratory Act*, in: G. O'BRIEN (ed.), *Parliament, Politics and People. Essays in 18th-century Irish History*, Dublin 1989, pp. 9-29.

¹² *New History of Ireland*, IV (above n. 1), p. 57. After 1767 the Lord Lieutenant resided permanently in Dublin. He therefore ceased to attend meetings of the Cabinet in England.

¹³ For Parliament see A. P. W. MALCOLMSON, *The parliamentary traffic of this country*, in: T. BARTLETT, D. W. HAYTON (eds.), *Penal Era and Golden Age. Essays in Irish History 1690-1800*, Belfast 1979, pp. 137-161; J. L. MCCracken, *The Irish Parliament in the Eighteenth Century*, Dundalk 1971, and B. FARRELL (ed.), *The Irish parliamentary Tradition*, Dublin 1973, in particular J. L. MCCracken, *From Swift to Grattan*, pp. 139-148, and J. LEE, *Grattan's Parliament*, pp. 149-159.

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In order to ensure the co-operation of the Irish Parliament it was normally sufficient for the British Cabinet to come to some sort of understanding with a number of Irish parliamentary patrons. These men, the so-called *undertakers*, saw to it that the Irish Parliament passed those measures which Westminster considered necessary. In exchange for their services the undertakers were not only rewarded by pensions and offices, but were also given control of the Irish administration. It was normally the undertakers who effectively governed Ireland, not the Lord Lieutenant who spent only brief periods of time there. Thus patronage, manipulation and downright corruption which were so crucial for creating political stability in England after 1714, were even more important in managing Irish politics.

The roots of the constitutional and political conflicts between Ireland and England during this period must be sought in the late 1760s and early 1770s. In the 1760s a *Patriot* opposition in the Irish House of Commons slowly emerged.¹⁴ The political ideals of this group were similar to those of the *country*-opposition in the British Parliament. To make Parliament more independent by reducing the influence of the Crown was probably this opposition's most important objective, but the establishment of a national militia and greater protection for what were seen as the fundamental rights and liberties of the Crown's subjects were also important *country* ideals.¹⁵ In the

¹⁴ D. LAMMEY, The growth of the 'patriot opposition' in Ireland during the 1770s, in: *Parliamentary History* 7 (1988), 257-281, in particular p. 262; cf. MCDOWELL, Ireland (above n. 1), pp. 209 ff. For the precursors of the Patriot opposition in the earlier decades of the century see DICKSON, Foundations (above n. 1), pp. 98, 128; FOSTER, Ireland (above n. 2), pp. 238 f; and *New History of Ireland*, IV (above n. 1), pp. 110 f, 118 f, and CONNOLLY, Religion, Law and Power (above n. 1), pp. 92 f.

¹⁵ See preceding note and for the country- or commonwealth ideology in general: C. A. ROBBINS, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthmen*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1959; I. F. KRAMNICK, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: the Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1968; J. G. A. POCKOCK, *The varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform*, in: *IDEM, Virtue, Commerce and History*, Cambridge 1985, 215-310, pp. 216-235, 241-249; also L. COLLEY, *In Defiance of Oligarchy. The Tory Party 1714-1760*, Cambridge 1982. The writings of Francis DOBBS, one of the leading Patriot authors, demonstrate how important country ideals were for the Irish opposition. They also show, however, that in the 1780s, England was still widely regarded as the example Ireland should follow. DOBBS

Dublin Parliament the politicians who subscribed to these objectives were a clear but vocal minority which found increasing support in public opinion outside Parliament.

The new Lord Lieutenant appointed in 1767, George Townshend, decided to appease this nascent opposition group. He agreed to an Octennial Act which limited Parliament's life to eight years. In the past elections for the Dublin House of Commons had been held at the beginning of a new Reign.¹⁶ This was a constitutional change of some significance, because it forced those members of Parliament who sat for counties or open boroughs to take more account of public opinion. Even more important, however, was Townshend's decision to reside permanently in Dublin and to reduce the influence of the parliamentary undertakers.¹⁷ Whereas the Lord Lieutenant's residing permanently in Ireland had been discussed in Britain throughout the 1760s, the destruction of the undertakers' power was to a large extent the result of a conflict between Townshend and the leading parliamentary magnates about the augmentation of the Irish army. Because Townshend was not prepared to offer the undertakers the price - in terms of grants, titles, pensions and lucrative offices - which they demanded for their support, they opposed his plan in

called for a national militia to be established in Ireland but he also quoted - approvingly - Montesquieu's remarks praising the English constitution and wrote: "That constitution is ours, and let it be our care to make it and to keep it perfect." (*A History of Irish Affairs from the 12th of September 1779 to the 15th of September 1782*, Dublin 1782, p. 165). Henry Grattan held similar views (McDOWELL, *Ireland* [above n. 1], p. 284).

¹⁶ *New History of Ireland*, IV (above n. 1), p. 205. The Earl of Charlemont, a liberal Patriot, came however, in retrospect, to the conclusion, that the Irish Commons had only passed the Octennial Act because they assumed that the British Cabinet would reject the bill. But the Cabinet gave its assent because it resented the obstructionist policies of the leading politicians in the Irish Parliament. (HMC, 12th Report, Appendix X, *The Manuscripts of . . . James First Earl of Charlemont*, vol. I, 1775-1783, London 1911, pp. 25 f).

¹⁷ On the Townshend Lieutenancy: T. BARTLETT, *The Townshend Viceroyalty 1767-1772*, in: BARTLETT, HAYTON, *Penal Era and Golden Age* (above n. 13), pp. 88-112, and BARTLETT, *Fall and Rise* (above n. 1), pp. 73 f.

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Parliament. Townshend was forced to take control over the management of Parliament himself. For the time being he was undoubtedly successful in creating a new government majority in the Commons, but in the long run the eclipse of the undertakers meant that the gulf between the parliamentary factions which supported the Lord Lieutenant's policy and the opposition groups became much deeper than before.

Thus by removing the influence of the undertakers, who had acted as patronage brokers and mediators between England and Ireland, Townshend's reforms caused tensions between the two countries to grow. It is important to see the Townshend Viceroyalty in a wider Atlantic and European context. While George Townshend was taking up the Irish Lord Lieutenancy his brother Charles was acting as Chancellor of the Exchequer in England. It was Charles Townshend who introduced the new taxes which were a major factor in provoking the North American colonies to revolt.¹⁸ The Townshend brothers were both advocates of reforms intended to strengthen the connection between the different parts of the British Empire, and to make its administration more efficient.

If enlightened absolutism can be identified with a programme of centralization and the attempt to destroy seemingly obsolete political and social structures by legislation, then a similar policy was undoubtedly applied to the British periphery and the Atlantic colonies after 1760.¹⁹ In Continental Europe such centralizing reforms often resulted in local revolts, or at least resistance. This resistance was frequently led by those very groups, noblemen or even officeholders, which in the past had been most closely connected with

¹⁸ P. D. G. THOMAS, *The Townshend Duties Crisis. The Second Phase of the American Revolution 1767-1773*, Oxford 1987. See also I. R. CHRISTIE, *Wars and Revolutions, Britain 1760-1815*, London 1982, pp. 92-94.

¹⁹ See A. G. OLSON, *Parliament, empire and parliamentary law, 1776*, in: J. G. A. POCOCK (ed.), *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776*, Princeton (N.J.) 1980, pp. 289-322, in particular pp. 304-306 und 310; Olson points out that Scotland was the first part of the Empire where legislation was used as an instrument of social reform after the Jacobite revolt of 1745. Later similar policies were pursued in the colonies and in Ireland, but not in England. Cf. also GREENE, *Peripheries and Center* (above n. 9).

the central authority.²⁰ In many ways the Patriotism of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland in the 1770s was a similar movement. It was a response to centralizing reforms which threatened to undermine the position of the Protestant aristocracy, gentry and professional classes - an attempt to find a new legitimation for the old established élite by appealing to the ideal of local autonomy. Patriots did not hesitate to use a discourse which had distinctly nationalist overtones, although in practice they were reluctant to face its full consequences.

II

The extent to which the traditional political balance had been upset by George Townshend during his Lord Lieutenancy became apparent during the American War of Independence. Not only did many Irishmen sympathize to some extent with the North American colonists, at least during the initial stages of the Anglo-American conflict,²¹ but America's revolt also demonstrated that determined resistance to Westminster could be successful. It was, however, the French King's decision to support the colonists against Britain in 1778 which led to a drastic deterioration in Britain's position. The regular troops stationed in Ireland were insufficient to defend the country against a French invasion, and the Dublin administration was therefore forced

²⁰ I am grateful to Professor Miroslaw HROCH (Prague) for having drawn my attention to this connection between enlightened absolutism and regional patriotism/nationalism. He will deal with this topic in a forthcoming article. In the meantime see his *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, Cambridge 1985, and R. J. W. EVANS, *Joseph II and Nationality in the Habsburg Lands*, in: H. M. SCOTT (ed.), *Enlightened Absolutism*, Basingstoke 1990, pp. 209-220. See also below n. 34.

²¹ M. E. O'CONNELL, *Irish Politics and Social Conflict in the Age of the American Revolution*, Westport (Conn.) 1965, pp. 26-34.

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to accept the formation of a self-controlled militia, the so-called *Volunteers*. The Volunteer regiments, initially mostly Protestant although many units later also accepted Catholics,²² soon became a stronghold of the Patriot movement. They demanded that the laws which restricted Irish trade with the colonies and Europe be repealed, and ultimately, that the Irish Parliament should enjoy the same status as its British counterpart.²³ The alliance with the armed Volunteers gave the Patriot opposition in Parliament, already strengthened by the eclipse of the undertakers, additional weight. Even members of Parliament who normally supported the administration now had to pay at least lip service to the Patriot demands.

Unlike the American colonists, the Irish Patriots of the 1770s never really questioned the Crown's rule over Ireland as such. What they did question, however, was the authority of the British Parliament.²⁴ They criticized the idea which had become a fundamental principle of the British constitution during the eighteenth century: the doctrine that within the Empire Parliament's power was unlimited, and that to all intents and purposes sovereignty lay not with the people, but with Parliament.²⁵ Within a purely English political context this doctrine had great advantages. By claiming sovereignty for Parliament as a whole, that is, for the three estates - King, Lords and Commons - it left the exact relationship between these three institutions safely

²² See P. ROGERS, *The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation, 1778-1793*, London 1934, and below n. 41.

²³ D. LAMMEY, *A Study of Anglo-Irish Relations between 1772 and 1782 with Particular Reference to the 'Free Trade' Movement*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University of Belfast 1984.

²⁴ Even the American opposition to imperial legislation had initially questioned only the authority of Parliament, not of the Crown: J. G. A. POCKOCK, 1776: The revolution against Parliament, in: *IDEM*, *Three Revolutions* (above n. 19), pp. 226-288, and OLSON, *Empire and parliamentary law* (above n. 19).

²⁵ H. T. DICKINSON, The eighteenth-century debate on the sovereignty of Parliament, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Ser., 26 (1976), pp. 189-210; cf. *IDEM*, *Liberty and Property. Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, London 1977, pp. 147 f, 216 f.

undefined. Moreover, it forestalled the potentially revolutionary consequences which the idea of intangible fundamental rights of individuals or the principle of popular sovereignty might have had.²⁶ In relation to those dominions of the English Crown which were not represented in Westminster, however, the idea of absolute parliamentary sovereignty created serious problems because it made the juxtaposition of several parliamentary bodies enjoying equal rights impossible.²⁷

Thus the Irish Patriots had to reject the British Parliament's claim to unlimited authority. One of them, Charles Francis Sheridan, brother of the poet and politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan, published a pamphlet in 1779 in which he tried to refute the interpretation of Parliament's authority which William Blackstone had given in his famous commentaries.²⁸ While rejecting the British Parliament's sovereignty over all dominions of the Crown, however, the Patriots were unable to claim a similar sovereignty for the Dublin Parliament within Ireland, because historically the Irish Parliament's powers had always been limited. Thus they were forced to fall back on the principle of popular sovereignty. Unfortunately this principle posed major

²⁶ On the role of the idea of parliamentary sovereignty in the British constitutional tradition and its function within the context of a multi-national state see J. C. D. CLARK, *Sovereignty: the British experience. Blackstone, Bentham and the origins of parliamentary absolutism*, in: *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 Nov. 1991, pp. 15 f, and IDEM, *Der föderale Charakter Großbritanniens*, in: G. LOTTES (ed.), *Region, Nation, Europa, Heidelberg/Regensburg 1992*, pp. 57-84. For the tradition of "Fundamental Law", opposed to parliamentary sovereignty cf. J. W. GOUGH, *Fundamental Law in English Constitutional History*, Oxford 1961.

²⁷ Cf. POCOCK, *Revolution* (above n. 24).

²⁸ C. F. SHERIDAN, *Observations Laid Down by Sir William Blackstone, Respecting the Extent of the Power of the British Parliament, Particularly with Relation to Ireland*, London 1779. Cf. R. B. MCDOWELL, *Irish Public Opinion 1750-1800*, London 1944, p. 63. Other authors also criticized (British) parliamentary absolutism. See, for example, Glanville SHARP, *A Declaration of the People's Right to a Share in the Legislature, which is a Fundamental Principle of the British Constitution of State*, London 1774. Cf. GOUGH, *Fundamental Law* (above n. 26), pp. 196 f.

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problems in Ireland, for if sovereignty lay with the people, then the question had to be asked: who were the people?²⁹

An Irish nation, comprising all social and religious groups hardly existed in the later eighteenth century. The distance between the Protestant Ascendancy on the one side, and the Catholics and to some extent even the Protestant Dissenters on the other³⁰ was too great, and there was no real sense of common identity. Some historians, therefore, have always been inclined to dismiss the so-called patriotism of the Ascendancy as mere hypocrisy. Thus D. George Boyce has written: "the spectacle of the New English interest assuming the mantle of the Irish nation is one more liable to excite contempt than admiration,"³¹ and more recently Gerard O'Brien has questioned the very existence of Ascendancy Patriotism let alone nationalism. O'Brien has pointed out that the authenticity of the early speeches given by the foremost spokesman of the Patriots in Parliament, Henry Grattan, is highly dubious. Grattan's speeches were published in the 1820s by his son, and apparently the text of the early speeches from before 1783 was thoroughly revised. However, other scholars have tried to demonstrate, with some success, I believe, that despite these revisions the arguments as opposed to the rhetorical

²⁹ Although SHERIDAN subscribed, in principle, to the idea of popular sovereignty (for example, *Observations*, pp. 44-46) he tried to evade the consequences which this idea would have had in practice, by declaring that a merely virtual representation of the majority of the population was acceptable. According to SHERIDAN any representation could be considered legitimate as long as the interests of the population and the men who represented them were - by and large - identical (*ibid.*, p. 49 f). He later revived this argument when he published a pamphlet against full Catholic emancipation (*The Roman Catholic Claim to the Elective Franchise Discussed*, Dublin 1793, in particular pp. 56-58; for SHERIDAN's biography see DNB).

³⁰ In practice Presbyterians - although legally entitled to vote - were excluded in most constituencies, in particular in the boroughs, from parliamentary elections (*New History of Ireland*, IV [above n. 1], p. 24 f).

³¹ D. G. BOYCE, *Nationalism in Ireland*, London/Canberra/Dublin 1982, p. 94. Thomas BARTLETT, also doubts the credibility of Protestant Patriotism. He sees Protestant demands for more Irish autonomy after 1778 as a reaction to attempts by the British government to seek an understanding with Irish Catholics (*Fall and Rise*, [above n. 1], pp. 91 f).

embellishments of Grattan's speeches as published by his son are largely authentic. A comparison with contemporary pamphlets supports this view.³²

In discussing this issue it is, however, important to recognize that the aristocratic "Patriotism" of the Ascendancy in Ireland was not as exceptional as it might seem at first sight. If what we find in Ireland in the late eighteenth century is nationalism without a nation, then the same holds true in general for colonial and semi-colonial societies attempting to gain autonomy or independence. The North American colonies in the 1770s and 1780s are a good example.³³ Nor is the phenomenon of an aristocratic upper class, a sort of "lateral ethnîe", trying to assume the leadership of a new, ill-defined, cross-class nation exceptional. The patriotic movements of the later eighteenth century in Northern and East-Central Europe are cases in point.³⁴ This is not

³² G. O'BRIEN, *The Grattan Mystique*, in: *Eighteenth Century Ireland 1* (1986), pp. 177-194; IDEM, *Illusion and reality in late eighteenth-century Irish politics*, in: *ibid.* 3 (1988), pp. 149-155; W. J. MCCORMACK, *Vision and revision in the study of eighteenth-century Irish parliamentary rhetoric*, in: *ibid.* 2 (1987), pp. 7-35. FRANCIS DOBBS' *History of Irish Affairs* (above n. 15) provides some evidence that Grattan's early speeches had a considerable impact (see, for example, p. 39 on the great speech of 19 May 1780). For an assessment of the role of Irish Patriotism see also J. T. LEERSSEN, *Anglo-Irish Patriotism and its European context: notes towards a reassessment*, in: *Eighteenth Century Ireland 3* (1988), pp. 7-24. LEERSSEN argues that patriotism - in Ireland as well as in late eighteenth-century Europe in general - was just a movement for constitutional, administrative and economic reform, in no way related to modern nationalism. He neglects, however, the intimate connection between constitutional reform and the "national question" in Ireland. For continental "patriotism" cf. R. VIERHAUS, "Patriotismus" - Begriff und Realität einer moralisch-politischen Haltung, in: IDEM, *Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 1987, pp. 96-109.

³³ A. D. SMITH, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford 1986, pp. 146-148; J. M. MURRIN, *A roof without walls. The dilemma of American national identity*, in: R. BEEMAN et al. (eds.), *Beyond Confederation: Origins of The Constitution and American National Identity*, Chapel Hill (N.C.) 1987, pp. 333-348. For the role of the American constitution in the process of creating an American nation see also G. S. WOOD, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, Chapel Hill (N.C.) 1969.

³⁴ For the problem in general see SMITH, *The Ethnic Origins*, pp. 166 f. SMITH gives Hungary as an example; for further examples see K. G. HAUSMANN, *Adelsgesellschaft und nationale Bewegung in Polen*, in: O. DANN (ed.), *Nationalismus und sozialer Wandel*, Hamburg 1978, pp. 23-48, and K. MYKLAND, *The growth of Norwegian national consciousness in the age of enlightenment: The economic, social and cultural factors*, in:

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to deny that the attempt to transform the Irish Protestant Ascendancy from a lateral ethnîe, an *Adelsnation* into the dominant group within a modern nation faced social and religious obstacles which were particularly difficult to overcome. In highly simplified terms, it could be said that the process of nation-building which was the only way to achieve such a transformation, could be effected either by appealing to the ideals of cultural nationalism, or by creating a nation defined by universal citizenship and common rights enjoyed by all its members.³⁵

Cultural nationalism was not really a serious option in later eighteenth-century Ireland. A number of intellectuals and scholars, mostly Protestants, did have a more serious interest in Gaelic culture and language at this time, but this interest was not politically motivated.³⁶ Thus the only way to create a cross-class nation would have been to extend the political rights which so far

S. DYRVIK et al. (eds.), *The Satellite State in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Bergen/Oslo 1979, pp. 185-198. In Norway the civil servants - many of Danish origin or at least educated in Denmark - and the "merchant aristocrats", for whom the same holds true, were the leaders of a new nationalism at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. For the problem in general see also the publications by M. HROCH, and EVANS, Joseph II (above n. 20).

³⁵ P. ALTER, *Nationalismus*, Frankfurt a.M. 1985, pp. 19 ff; SMITH, *Ethnic Origins* (above n. 33), pp. 134-152, and IDEM, *National Identity*, London 1991, pp. 71 ff. The literature on nationalism is so vast that even a selection of titles would require too much space. However, B. GIESEN (ed.), *Nationale und kulturelle Identität*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, is a recent collection of essays which is helpful for the discussion about the early modern roots of nationalism.

³⁶ See N. VANCE, *Celts, Carthaginians and constitutions: Anglo-Irish literary relations, 1780-1820*, in: *Irish Historical Studies* 22 (1981), pp. 216-238. Cf. FOSTER, *Ireland* (above n. 2), p. 252. Nevertheless, there were attempts - at the end of the eighteenth century - to create national symbols which could appeal to all religious denominations. The celebration of St. Patrick's Day is a case in point. See J. R. HILL, *National festivals, the state and 'Protestant Ascendancy' in Ireland 1790-1829*, in: *Irish Historical Studies* 24 (1984), pp. 30-51. For the relative weakness of cultural nationalism in nineteenth-century Ireland see L. M. CULLEN, *The Emergence of Modern Ireland*, London 1981, pp. 132, 138 f and 250 ff; cf. IDEM, *The cultural basis of modern Irish nationalism*, in: R. MITCHISON (ed.), *The Roots of Nationalism: Studies in Northern Europe*, Edinburgh 1980, pp. 91-106. Cf. further for a slightly different interpretation J. SMYTH, *The Men of No Property. Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century*, Basingstoke 1992, p. 83.

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only the Church of Ireland Protestants, and in practice by and large only the Protestant aristocracy, gentry, and urban upper classes had enjoyed to dissenting Protestants and Catholics, or at least to those who were members of the propertied classes.

Most of the members of the Protestant Ascendancy were undoubtedly reluctant to endorse such a policy.³⁷ Even liberal Patriots such as Henry Grattan, the foremost spokesman of the Patriots in Parliament hesitated to support the political emancipation of Catholics in the 1780s. Only after 1790, when politicians in England as well as in Ireland began to see the French Revolution as a serious threat to political and social order did Grattan and his political allies recognize the full extent of the problem they were facing.

III

In 1780 the Patriot movement had gained its first great victory. Britain agreed to repeal the commercial legislation which restricted the Irish export trade. Two years later the Patriots achieved another and even more momentous success. During the political crisis precipitated by the defeat which Britain was about to suffer in America, the British Cabinet and Parliament agreed to repeal the Declaratory Act of 1720, which had confirmed Parliament's right to pass legislation for Ireland. Moreover, Poyning's Law, the late-medieval statute which restricted the right of the Dublin Parliament to initiate legislation was

³⁷ Anti-Catholicism became more subdued after 1770 but retained nevertheless much of its former strength. The influence of the Enlightenment was ambiguous in this respect. Educated Protestants came to reject downright persecution of Catholicism, but the alleged backwardness of Catholic "superstition" and clericalism could nevertheless serve to justify the remaining Protestant privileges (BARTLETT, *Fall and Rise* [above n. 1], pp. 67-69).

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also repealed. In legal terms the two Parliaments at Westminster and at Dublin now enjoyed equal status.³⁸

However, in the final resort the constitutional revolution of 1782 - if such it was³⁹ - posed more questions than it answered. Protestant popular opinion remained dissatisfied with the merely formal autonomy achieved in 1782, whereas the more conservative members of the ruling Ascendancy were anxious to avoid any measures which might loosen the connection between Ireland and Britain even further. This group, which reasserted its position in administration and Parliament after 1782,⁴⁰ also opposed parliamentary reform, which large sections of the public demanded at this time.⁴¹ If the English influence on Parliament was to be reduced such a reform was essential. However, even if reform meant only that Parliament were to become more representative of the propertied classes and that the dominant position of a small group of patrons - who were not even representative of the great aristocratic landholders as such⁴² - were to be destroyed, it would have raised the question of full Catholic emancipation. Should the Catholics who

³⁸ LAMMEY, *Study* (above n. 23) pp. 84 ff; *New History of Ireland*, IV (above n. 1), pp. 225 ff. For earlier Irish demands for free trade and protests against the Woollen Act of 1699 see CULLEN, *Economic Development 1691-1750* (above n. 3), pp. 138-141.

³⁹ FOSTER (Ireland [above n. 2], p. 251) writes: "The reality of 1782 was largely cosmetic."

⁴⁰ The leading exponents of a conservative policy within the "Irish Cabinet" of the late 1780s were John Beresford (from 1780 Chief Commissioner of the Revenue), John Foster (elected Speaker of the Irish Commons in 1785) and John Fitzgibbon (Lord Chancellor since 1789). See W. MALCOLMSON, *John Foster. The Politics of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy*, Oxford 1978, pp. 257-361, 384-397.

⁴¹ J. KELLY, *The parliamentary reform movement of the 1780s and the Catholic question*, in: *Archivium Hibernicum* 43/44 (1988), pp. 95-117.

⁴² MALCOLMSON (Foster [above n. 40], pp. 356 f) argues that the supporters of parliamentary reform within the House of Commons, in particular the Ponsonby faction and Grattan, did not want to make Parliament more democratic but more "aristocratic". The influence of "borough proprietors" holding only comparatively small estates was to be reduced and that of the great landed magnates - who were frequently unable to influence borough elections - to be increased.

had lost the right to vote for Parliament in 1728 regain this privilege? Should they even be entitled to sit in Parliament?⁴³

From 1781 onwards Catholics had been increasingly integrated into the Volunteer movement. In about 1784 between 33 and 44 percent of Volunteers in the Irish counties were Catholics.⁴⁴ Between 1778 and 1782 the position of the Catholic church had been legalized and most of the legal disabilities restricting the private and commercial life of Catholics had been abolished.⁴⁵ Since the 1770s religious sectarianism had become more muted⁴⁶ and only few Protestants protested against Catholic emancipation as long as the Protestant monopoly of political power was not questioned. Active support, however, for granting Catholics political rights - as opposed to merely giving Catholics the right to practise their own religion freely - was by and large limited to certain liberal or radical circles in Dublin, Belfast and East

⁴³ KELLY, Reform movement (above n. 41); BARTLETT, Fall and Rise (above n. 1), pp. 103 ff.

⁴⁴ Only the anti-Catholic counties of Meath, north of Dublin, and of Wexford in the south-east were clear exceptions in the respect; J. KELLY, Interdenominational relations and religious toleration in late eighteenth-century Ireland: the 'paper war' of 1786-88, in: *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 3 (1988), 39-67, p. 42.

⁴⁵ *New History of Ireland*, IV (above n. 1), p. 233; J. R. HILL, Religious toleration and the relaxation of the penal laws: an imperial perspective 1763-1800, in: *Archivium Hibernicum* 44 (1989), pp. 90-110; E. O'FLAHERTY, Ecclesiastical politics and the dismantling of the penal laws in Ireland 1774-1782, in: *Irish Historical Studies* 26 (1988), pp. 33-50; BARTLETT, Fall and Rise (above n. 1), pp. 82-102.

⁴⁶ The Earl of Charlemont thought that religious indifference was largely responsible for the more tolerant mood of this period. But he also pointed out that the increasing wealth of Catholic merchants and the fact that many converts from Catholicism held parliamentary seats gave Catholics some influence on political decisions. "Thus by degrees was a Popish party formed, not wholly inconsiderable even in the House of Commons." (HMC, Charlemont, I [above n. 16], pp. 45, 46).

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Ulster.⁴⁷ The majority of the Protestant gentry, the core of the Ascendancy, remained either uncommitted, sceptical or positively hostile.

Not until the 1790s when the British government sought Catholic co-operation in the struggle against the French Revolution, was there stronger Protestant support in Ireland for Catholic political emancipation. Even at that stage support was limited to radical and liberal circles. Whatever their stand on emancipation, all Protestants wanted to maintain the dominant cultural and social position they traditionally held. What distinguished the supporters of emancipation from their opponents was the belief that this dominant position was compatible with emancipation. In 1792, during the debate on a bill to improve the status of Catholics, Henry Grattan, one of the architects of the constitutional "revolution" of 1782, asked his own co-religionists to become the "head of a growing nation" instead of "the first sect in a distracted land, rendered by that division a province, and not a nation". In Grattan's opinion the Protestant Ascendancy "required a new strength". "You must find that strength," he declared, addressing his fellow Protestants, "in adopting a people, - a progressive adoption of the Catholic body, in such a manner . . . as shall gradually unite, and ultimately incorporate."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ HILL, Religious toleration (above n. 45). The letters of William DRENNAN, who was one of the most enthusiastic radical reformers in Belfast, show clearly that resistance to full emancipation was still almost general among Protestants in the early 1780s. In autumn 1784 DRENNAN wrote: "The Roman Catholic question was our ruin, but if the reformers had not *pretended* [Italics in original] a wish for alliance with them on the grand question, government would have anticipated the Volunteers and made the Catholic Volunteers act against the Protestants." (The Drennan Letters, ed. D. A. CHART, Belfast 1931, No. 113, p. 24, Drennan to Mrs. McTier, autumn 1784, cf. nos. 104, autumn 1783, and 107, Oct. 1783). However, during the early 1790s DRENNAN changed his position and accepted co-operation with Catholics as a necessary precondition of reform. In his opinion Grattan had come round to the same view (Nos. 305, 306 and 310, July, Aug. and 5 Nov. 1791, in particular p. 62). Cf. A. T. Q. STEWART, "A stable unseen power": Dr. William Drennan and the origins of the United Irishmen, in: J. BOSSY, P. JUPP (eds.), Essays presented to Michael Roberts, Belfast 1976, pp. 80-92.

⁴⁸ The Speeches of the Right Hon. Henry Grattan, Edited by his Son, 4 vols., London 1822, II, pp. 368, 370, 18 Febr. 1792. For Grattan's position cf. MALCOLMSON, Foster (above n. 40), pp. 355-357, 411; BARTLETT, Fall and Rise (above n. 1), pp. 92, 144, 158;

Grattan's hope that an incorporation and assimilation of the Catholics by the Protestants was possible might in retrospect seem unrealistic, given the course Irish politics took in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, at the time this hope was shared by many Protestant middle class radicals outside Parliament.⁴⁹ Basically Grattan and other Protestant Patriots assumed that organized religion would gradually become a merely private affair, thereby losing its direct influence on politics.⁵⁰ If, however, society was becoming more and more secularized, then the economically and culturally dominant position of the Protestants within society would be strong enough, it seemed, to persuade the growing Catholic middle classes that the only way to be accepted socially was to assimilate themselves to the Protestants.

IV

Immediately after the constitutional changes of 1782, however, the proponents of parliamentary reform were still divided on the issue of Catholic emancipation. The English government and the Lord Lieutenant therefore

and DRENNAN's remarks (above n. 47). Another MP, Colonel John Hely Hutchinson, also declared: "You are in the middle between Irish Catholic and English Protestant, you must either adopt the one, or unite with the other, you must either renounce your prejudices or abdicate your legislative supremacy." (*The Parliamentary Register . . . of the Commons of Ireland*, XII, Dublin 1793, p. 145; cf. *New History of Ireland*, IV [above n. 1], pp. 310-313). More cautious politicians did not reject political emancipation as such but they warned their colleagues: "you must reconcile before you unite; you must assimilate before you incorporate." (Sir Hercules Langrishe, Febr. 1793, *Parliamentary Register*, XIII, p. 91).

⁴⁹ See below for Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen.

⁵⁰ GRATTAN, *Speeches*, II (above n. 48), 371 f, in particular p. 371: "I apply to the present state of religion in Europe, and I deny that men act as religious combinations, except where they are interdicted."

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found it comparatively easy to resist the demand for further political reform.⁵¹ Thus the Patriot movement ground to a halt in the mid-1780s. Other circumstances also began to favour a revival of conservative anti-Catholic attitudes at this time. During the years 1785 to 1786 a series of agrarian disturbance commenced which were to culminate in the 1790s. The so-called Rightboy Movement of the mid-eighties was primarily directed against tithes and clerical fees, Protestant as well as Catholic. It was thus, at least initially, not sectarian in character. Nevertheless, by demonstrating the weakness of the established church it provoked efforts to strengthen the old alliance of landlords and Protestant clergymen, which seemed momentarily to be on the point of breaking down, because some Protestant landowners openly sympathized with the Rightboys during the early stages of the movement.⁵²

A number of pamphlets published during these years tried to revive the old and deep seated fears of the Irish Protestants. Among these tracts *The Present State of the Church of Ireland*, by Bishop Richard Woodward was probably the most influential.⁵³ Woodward's tract made a major contribution to the creation of a new conceptual framework for the defense of the ecclesiastical, political and social *status quo*, a framework which was to remain valid for the following decades. Although Woodward used the expression "Protestant

⁵¹ For the increasing reluctance of the aristocracy and gentry to support parliamentary reform at this stage see Drenann Letters nos. 107, Oct. 1783, and 112, Mrs. McTier to Drenann, 14 Oct. 1784, pp. 23 f.

⁵² J. S. DONNELLY, The Rightboy Movement 1785-6, in: *Studia Hibernica* 17-18 (1978), 120-202, in particular pp. 137, 149 on Protestant gentry support for the Rightboys. Cf. M. J. BRIC, Priests, Parsons and Politics: the Rightboy Protest in County Cork 1785-88, in: *Past and Present* 100 (1983), pp. 100-123. For rural unrest in general see: S. J. CONNOLLY, Violence and order in the 18th century, in: P. O'FLANAGAN et al. (eds.), *Rural Ireland 1600-1900. Modernization and Change*, Cork 1987, pp. 42-61.

⁵³ Dublin 1787. For the context of Woodward's pamphlet see J. KELLY, The Genesis of 'Protestant Ascendancy'. The Rightboy disturbances of the 1780s and their impact upon Protestant Opinion, in: O'BRIEN, Politics and People (above n. 11), pp. 92-127; IDEM, Interdenominational Relations (above n. 44), and J. R. HILL, The meaning and significance of 'Protestant Ascendancy' 1787-1840, in: *Ireland after the Union (Proceedings of the . . . Royal Irish and the British Academy London 1986)*, Oxford 1989, pp. 1-22, in particular pp. 6-11, and SMYTH, Men of No Property (above n. 36), pp. 19 f.

Ascendancy" primarily in the sense of "Protestant superiority, government by and for Protestants", he prepared the ground for another use of "Ascendancy" which from the 1790s onwards came to signify the Protestant élite as a social group.⁵⁴ The publication of Woodward's tract marks the point where traditional antipopery was being transformed into a new ideology: the ruling Protestant élite, having conceded religious toleration, had to retreat to an ideological fall-back position. Not Protestantism as such was declared to be the essential principle of the constitution, but the political superiority of the Protestants as a social group; this superiority was conceptualized by the expression "Protestant Ascendancy".

For Woodward - and on this point his position clearly differed from that of the Protestant Patriot movement - the status of the Protestants in Ireland as a social group could be maintained only if the connection between Britain and Ireland remained inviolate. In Woodward's opinion, however, the revolution of the American colonists had shown clearly enough that common ethnic origins and a common language were insufficient to prevent the separation of two countries traditionally united under the rule of one sovereign.⁵⁵ In the last resort, apart from the community of law and property, only a common religion established by law could function as a bond between different countries belonging to a greater political community. The privileges of the Church of Ireland were defended by Woodward from a "point of view merely political" as being necessary to maintain the connection with England which in turn served to protect the existing social structure of Ireland.⁵⁶ Bishop Woodward's argument, that the church was an indispensable part of the

⁵⁴ HILL, *Meaning*, pp. 7, 18 f; HILL argues that "Ascendancy" was first employed in its new sense in 1792. KELLY (*Genesis*, pp. 97, 102 f), however, considers Woodward as the inventor of the term as a label for a social group.

⁵⁵ WOODWARD, *Present State* (above n. 53), p. 79: "the joint effect of all these ties [language, consanguinity and sovereignty] was not sufficient to prevent the separation of America from England."

⁵⁶ WOODWARD, *Present State* (above n. 53), p. 5, cf. also p. 80, where the danger to property in general, in case tithes were abolished, is emphasized.

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established social order which would collapse without it, was to gain enormous influence in the 1790s, not only in Ireland but also in England when revolutionary movements looking to France for inspiration seemed to threaten the existing political and social structure. Woodward, however, continued to see the church in a fairly traditional way as the natural *ally* of the state, whereas Edmund Burke for example, the foremost intellectual opponent of the French Revolution in England, tended to regard the church as a *model* for the state.⁵⁷

Even more important than Woodward's renewed affirmation of the necessary connection between state and church was his claim, that the various dominions governed by the English Crown were, after 1783, in need of a renewed sense of common identity based on a community of law, property and religion. New varieties of militant Protestantism were indeed to play a crucial role from the 1790s onwards in creating this new sense of imperial and British identity.⁵⁸

IV

In the late 1780s Woodward's position was still far from representative of the Protestant community as a whole, although the more inflexible opponents of political change within the Ascendancy were clearly closing ranks. During the 1790s, however, the French Revolution led to a strong political

⁵⁷ For reflections on the church-state relationship in the eighteenth century and Burke's position see J. C. D. CLARK, *English Society 1688-1832*, Cambridge 1985, pp.139-141, 247 ff, 258 ff; cf. HILL, *Meaning* (above n. 53), p. 10, for WOODWARD.

⁵⁸ See below n. 75, 82. The new militant Protestantism of the early nineteenth century put much more emphasis on converting the Catholics than traditional antipopery had done. The first signs of an hitherto unknown missionary zeal are already visible in WOODWARD's tract (for example, *Present State* [above n. 53], pp. 53 f: decline of the Celtic language favouring conversion of Catholics).

polarization in Ireland.⁵⁹ The Revolution created fears that the Catholic peasants, supported by a French invasion, would rise against their masters and massacre all Protestants.⁶⁰

The reaction to the combination of social protest, sectarian violence and revolutionary republicanism which the Protestant propertied classes faced in the late 1790s was frequently downright panic, which became all the more hysterical because England's support for the Irish Protestants seemed to be wavering.⁶¹ In England, Irish Catholics had been discovered as potential allies in the battle against the French Revolution. Edmund Burke, himself born in Ireland, supported Catholic emancipation, and his son Richard acted as secretary of the National Committee of the Irish Catholics.⁶²

Under British pressure the Irish Parliament passed an act in 1793 which restored to Catholics the right to vote for Parliament. Catholics, however, continued to be excluded from Parliament itself; they could not be elected as

⁵⁹ William DRENNAN, the Belfast Protestant radical, commented on this political polarization in 1795: "The unhappy circumstances of the times have destroyed all gradations of opinion, the isthmus of neutrality has been worn away by the contending waves . . . the anarchy of interests has resolved into two distinct casts. . . . Aristocracy of all kinds, political and religious, hastens to coalesce with monarchy." (William DRENNAN, *A Philosophical Essay of the Moral and Political State of Ireland in a Letter to the Earl Fitzwilliam*, [originally published 1795] 3rd edn. London 1797, p. 6).

⁶⁰ Although these fears were exaggerated, the French did indeed try to invade Ireland in the late 1790s, and during the great rebellion which broke out in some Irish counties in 1798 the rebels were moved by a strange mixture of sectarian motives and revolutionary hopes. For the Catholic peasants there was nothing illogical in seeing revolutionary France as the restorer of an Ireland dominated by Catholics. See T. BARTLETT, *Defenders and Defenderism* in 1795, in: *Irish Historical Studies* 24 (1985), pp. 373-394, and *idem*, *Fall and Rise* (above n. 1), pp. 211 f, 238. For the impact of the French Revolution on Ireland cf. D. DICKSON, H. GOUGH (eds.), *Ireland and the French Revolution*, Dublin 1990.

⁶¹ See T. BARTLETT, *An end to moral economy: the Irish militia disturbances of 1793*, in: C. H. E. PHILPIN (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest*, Cambridge 1987, pp. 191-218. (First published in *Past and Present* 99 [1983], pp. 41-64), BARTLETT argues that the militia disturbances were the first in a series of riots which the gentry and propertied classes, whether Catholic or Protestant, proved unable to control - in contrast to earlier riots which had followed a more traditional pattern of protest.

⁶² T. H. D. MAHONEY, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1960, pp. 181 ff, 193 f, 206 ff, 241 ff and *passim*.

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representatives. The failure to achieve full emancipation - it was not to come until 1829 - left the Catholics dissatisfied, but the more conservative Protestants were equally resentful because strong pressure had been brought to bear by the British Cabinet on the Irish Parliament to ensure the passage of the Emancipation Act. Resistance to emancipation was strengthened by the fact that the 40s-freeholders entitled to vote in county elections were comparatively more numerous in Ireland than in England. Even if the new voters - many of them living in great poverty - had not belonged to a religious group which in the past had been denied all political rights, their enfranchisement could be seen as a measure which would upset the whole existing political system.⁶³

However panic-stricken fear of revolution was not the only possible reaction to the events of the 1790s. Among other Protestants the French Revolution raised hopes for radical political reform. This was true mainly of middle-class Protestants in Dublin and Belfast and in rural areas, in particular Eastern Ulster, where there was little evidence of sectarian tensions because the Protestants were in a clear majority.⁶⁴ Probably the best known spokesman

⁶³ LECKY, *History of Ireland*, III (above n. 1), pp. 156 ff and p. 71. On the one hand, conservative politicians feared that the political emancipation of Catholics would result in social revolution (*ibid.*). On the other hand, radicals like Drennan feared that the existing oligarchy would strengthen its position by buying "cheap" Catholic votes in parliamentary elections (DRENNAN, *Philosophical Essay* [above n. 59], p. 38 ff and 59). In practice the participation of Catholics in elections had little serious impact until the 1820s. When Catholics finally gained the right to be elected - not just to vote - in 1829 the county franchise was at the same time restricted to £ 10-freeholders (this reduced the electorate from 216,000 to 37,000 voters). In any case the Irish Conservatives were normally able to win a majority of the Irish seats until the 1850s (K. T. HOPPEN, *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity*, London 1989, pp. 16 f, p. 31, note 1, and p. 114; cf. P. J. JUPP, *Irish parliamentary elections and the influence of the Catholic vote, 1801-1820*, in: *Historical Journal* 10 [1967], pp. 183-196).

⁶⁴ For Ulster see D. W. MILLER, *Queen's Rebels. Ulster Loyalism in Historical Perspective*, Dublin 1978, pp. 50 ff; P. BROOKE, *Ulster Presbyterianism. The Historical Perspective 1610-1970*, New York 1987, pp. 115 ff; P. GIBBON, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism*, Manchester 1975, pp. 35 ff; cf. CULLEN, *Cultural Basis* (above n. 36), p. 100: "Harmony is attainable in Irish circumstances only when one side is dominant."

of the radical movement was Theobald Wolfe Tone, son of a Protestant Dublin coachmaker, who became the agent of the Irish Catholic Committees in 1792. He was also one of the leaders of the Society of United Irishmen, which had been founded in 1791 in Belfast. The United Irishmen were a radical political club which became a secret society after its suppression in 1794.⁶⁵ Although initially fighting only for parliamentary reform, Catholic emancipation and full autonomy for Ireland it eventually came to support the idea of an independent Irish republic.⁶⁶

Tone saw the Catholic urban middle classes as the natural allies of Protestant radicalism in the battle against English influence in Ireland and against the corrupt Irish aristocracy. He supported full Catholic emancipation, but made no secret of his contempt for traditional Catholicism. For Tone Catholic priests were "men of low birth, low feelings, low habits and no education".⁶⁷ In his opinion the whole Catholic peasantry represented the forces of ignorance and bigotry, and at times he considered even the Catholic gentry, as far as it still existed, to be in a degraded state.⁶⁸ However, Tone was

⁶⁵ For Tone and the United Irishmen see M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France*, London 1982; EADEM, *Wolfe Tone, Prophet of Irish Independence*, New Haven (Conn.)/London 1989, and EADEM, *The origins and transformation of early Irish republicanism*, in: *International Review of Social History* 23 (1978), pp. 405-428, and SMYTH, *Men of No Property* (above n. 36). Cf. further E. RÜDEBUSCH, *Irland im Zeitalter der Revolution. Politik und Publizistik der United Irishmen 1791-98*, Frankfurt a.M. 1989.

⁶⁶ ELLIOTT, *Tone*, pp. 139 f, quoting the *Declarations and Resolutions of the Society of United Irishmen of Belfast* (October 1791) on the early programme of the United Irishmen.

⁶⁷ *An Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, in: *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, ed. W. T. WOLFE TONE, 2 vols., Washington 1826, I, pp. 341 ff, in particular p. 356. Cf. ELLIOTT, *Tone* (above n. 65), pp. 121 ff, in particular p. 129. Cf. T. DUNNE, *Theobald Wolfe Tone, Colonial Outsider: An Analysis of His Political Philosophy*, Cork 1982.

⁶⁸ In his autobiographical notes TONE criticized the Emancipation Bill of 1793 for having given the vote to the Catholic peasantry - governed by "ignorance and bigotry" - while at the same time the Catholic urban middle classes remained excluded from parliamentary politics (not being allowed to sit in Parliament or to vote in parliamentary boroughs): *Life*, I, p. 100, and p. 46.

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confident that traditional Catholicism, hateful as it was, would disintegrate. Indeed, he believed that among the educated it had already done so. In 1791 he wrote: "The emancipated and liberal Irishman like the emancipated and liberal Frenchman may go to mass, may tell his beads or sprinkle his mistress with holy water, but neither the one or the other will attend the rusty and extinguished thunderbolts of the Vatican."⁶⁹

Tone did not expect Irish Catholics to convert to Protestantism in the strict sense of the word, but he assumed an identity between the principles of enlightened rationality and Protestant culture. In Tone's opinion, Catholics had to choose between "bigotry" and this Protestant culture, whose most enlightened representatives were to be found, as he thought, among Presbyterians and Dissenters.⁷⁰ Thus Tone shared the conviction of more conservative Protestants that the Catholic had to become "civilly and politically . . . a member of the Protestant community,"⁷¹ but he was more optimistic than his conservative opponents about the chances of bringing about such an assimilation within a fairly short time.

As the violent disturbances of the mid-1790s showed, however, the mass of the Catholic rural population, which was clearly resistant to the sort of assimilation Tone had hoped for, could no longer be controlled by the members of the propertied classes, no matter whether they were Protestant or Catholic.⁷² At the same time sectarian tensions were rising in those rural areas of Ireland where there was a large Protestant as well as a large Catholic

⁶⁹ An argument, *ibid.*, p. 358.

⁷⁰ Nicholas CANNY argues that Tone belonged to the tradition of Irish Protestants who saw economic and cultural progress in Ireland as an essential precondition for the victory of Protestantism. Unlike earlier exponents of this tradition, however, Tone believed that such progress could only be achieved if England's domination of Ireland came to an end (N. CANNY, *Identity formation in Ireland: The emergence of the Anglo-Irish*, in: N. CANNY, A. PAGDEN (eds.), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World 1500-1800*, Princeton [N.C.] 1987, 159-213, p. 208).

⁷¹ SHERIDAN, *Roman Catholic Claim* (above n. 29), p. 137; cf. Sir Hercules Langrishe's remarks quoted above n. 49.

⁷² See BARTLETT, *Militia disturbance* (above n. 61).

population. Here small Protestant farmers were in direct competition with Catholics for land and resources (a situation which was exacerbated by the rapid growth of the Irish population since the mid-eighteenth century).⁷³

Economic developments, however, are insufficient to explain why sectarian tensions did not disappear as Protestant radicals like Tone and liberals like Grattan alike had hoped. Long-term religious developments were equally important. Irish Protestantism had always been strongly anti-Catholic though it was probably less so in the 1770s and 1780s than ever before.⁷⁴ But traditionally antipopery had mostly been directed against the Catholic church as an institution, whereas the mass conversion of individual Catholics had not been a serious objective.⁷⁵

From the 1790s onwards the impact of Methodism and evangelical Protestantism was felt in Ireland. For these new movements formal obedience

⁷³ This was the case in Wexford, the county where the 1798 rebellion became more violent than anywhere else, but also in County Armagh in Ulster. In Armagh, which was a centre of the domestic textile industry producing linen, the economic competition was particularly fierce and it was here that the Orange Order, a secret anti-Catholic organization, was founded in 1795. See GIBBON, *Unionism* (above n. 64), pp. 32-42; D. W. MILLER, *The Armagh troubles 1784-1795*, in: S. CLARK, J. S. DONNELLY (eds.), *Irish Peasants. Violence and Political Unrest 1780-1914*, Madison (Wisc.) 1983, pp. 155-191, and CULLEN, *1798 Rebellion* (above n. 8). For the 1798 Rebellion see also T. PAKENHAM, *The Year of Liberty*, London 1969; K. WHELAN, *The religious factor in the 1798 rebellion in county Wexford*, in: O'FLANAGAN, *Rural Ireland* (above n. 52), pp. 62-85; IDEM, *Politicisation in County Wexford and the origins of the 1798 Rebellion*, in: DICKSON, GOUGH, *Revolution* (above n. 60), pp. 156-178, and most recently BARTLETT, *Fall and Rise* (above n. 1), pp. 173 ff, 228 ff.

⁷⁴ See above n. 37, 45.

⁷⁵ For the transformation of Protestantism see D. W. MILLER, *Presbyterianism and "Modernization" in Ulster*, in: PHILPIN, *Nationalism* (above n. 61), pp. 80-109, originally in: *Past and Present* 80 (1978), pp. 66-90 (quoted here after *Past and Present*); cf. J. R. HILL, *Popular Protestantism in Ulster in the post-Rebellion period, c. 1790-1810*, in: W. J. SHEILS, D. WOOD (eds.), *The Churches, Ireland and the Irish* (*Studies in Church History* 25), Oxford 1989, pp. 191-202; D. HEMPTON, *Gideon Ouseley: Rural Revivalist, 1791-1839*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 203-214; IDEM, *The Methodist Crusade in Ireland 1795/1845*, in: *Irish Historical Studies* 22 (1980), pp. 33-48, and most recently D. HEMPTON, M. HILL, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society 1740-1890*, London 1992, pp. 20 ff and 81 ff.

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to the church as an institution and acceptance of a set of religious doctrines was far less important than a personal experience of faith and conversion. Evangelicals tried to bring this experience of conversion not only to people who were already nominally Protestants, but also to Catholics. Although it took about 30 years before Ulster Presbyterianism and larger sections of the established church became really committed to this new variety of antipopery, the attempt of enthusiastic missionaries to undermine the foundations of Catholicism at the very moment when the legal status of the Catholic church had for the first time been officially recognized contributed greatly to the growth of new religious tensions.⁷⁶ The disruptive effect of militant Protestantism was all the stronger because the Protestant evangelical revival of the early nineteenth century had a greater impact in Ireland than in England. This can perhaps be attributed, as David Miller has argued, to the fact that ethnic cultural nationalism did not really flourish in Ireland as an alternative secular religion. Later, sectarian loyalties were further intensified by the failure of "working-class consciousness" to develop.⁷⁷

Thus long-term social and religious developments were working against the success of middle-class Protestant Irish radicalism and non-sectarian nationalism. In the shorter term the tide was also turning against radicalism and Protestant nationalism in the mid-1790s. After a brief liberal interlude under Lord Lieutenant Fitzwilliam in 1795 the conservatives in Parliament and administration reasserted their position.⁷⁸ With the path to peaceful change

⁷⁶ MILLER, *Presbyterianism*, pp. 85-88; D. BOWEN, *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland 1800-1870*, Dublin 1978.

⁷⁷ For the absence of cultural nationalism: MILLER, *Presbyterianism* (above n. 75), p. 90. Miller is referring here to Ulster, but cultural nationalism in the strict sense of the word remained weak in Catholic Ireland, too (see above n. 36). For the stunted development of "class consciousness" see SMYTH, *Men of No Property* (above n. 36), p. 8; cf. M. HECHTER, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, Berkeley (Cal.) 1975, pp. 285 ff.

⁷⁸ For a short time in the mid-1790s it had seemed that the Emancipation Bill of 1793 would be followed by more comprehensive measures and that the liberal Patriot faction in the Irish Parliament would be swept into power through the appointment of Lord

blocked, the United Irishmen now tried to gain the support of the revolutionary government in France for an independent Irish republic. Total separation from Britain and the overthrow of the ruling aristocracy in Ireland now became their declared aim. However, when the rebellion they had hoped for did eventually take place in 1798 it soon turned into a sectarian civil war and was quickly crushed by the army and yeomanry.⁷⁹

The rebellion did succeed, however, in scaring the Protestant aristocracy and gentry who dominated Parliament to such an extent that they finally agreed to a Union between Ireland and Britain in 1800.⁸⁰ The rebellion of 1798 and its aftermath, the Union, marked the end of the experiment which had started with the Volunteer movement of the late 1770s and the constitutional changes of 1782 - the experiment of a semi-independent Ireland, a potential nation state led by the Protestant Ascendancy.

Protestant Irish Patriotism had failed, both in its aristocratic version as represented by Grattan and in its middle-class radical variety as represented by Wolfe Tone. The ruling élite, the Ascendancy, had never identified itself

Fitzwilliam, a representative of the English Whigs as Lord Lieutenant. Nothing came of this however, because Fitzwilliam lost the confidence of Prime Minister Pitt, by trying to achieve great changes in Ireland (full emancipation) without consulting the British Cabinet sufficiently (BARTLETT, *Fall and Rise* [above n. 1], pp. 193-200; cf. G. O'BRIEN, *Anglo-Irish Politics in the Age of Grattan and Pitt*, Dublin 1987).

⁷⁹ N. J. CURTIN, *The transformation of the Society of United Irishmen into a mass-based revolutionary organisation 1794-96*, in: *Irish Historical Studies* 24 (1985), pp. 463-492; BARTLETT, *Fall and Rise* (above n. 1), pp. 228-268.

⁸⁰ In Parliament Grattan and his friends found that the more extreme conservatives were their allies in resisting the Union. Whereas Grattan rejected the Union because it spelt the end of his vision of an Irish nation, the conservatives did not believe that the British government would suppress social and political unrest as ruthlessly as they wished and feared that in the end England would seek a compromise with the Catholics. See G. C. BOLTON, *The Passing of the Irish Act of Union*, Oxford 1966, in particular pp. 129-138 and 158 f. Cf. BARTLETT, *Fall and Rise* (above n. 1), pp. 151-159, who tries to show that at the end of the 1790s most members of the Ascendancy had come to accept the Union - although with misgivings - as inevitable if their political position was to be maintained against the Catholics.

The Protestant Ascendancy

whole-heartedly with Patriotism in politics. Only in economic affairs, where Ireland's prosperity seemed to be threatened by England, did most of them support the cause of Patriotism. Radicals and moderates alike tended to attribute Ireland's economic backwardness to English influence and to Ireland's subordinate constitutional position with regard to England. They therefore hoped that constitutional change would bring not only political self-determination but also economic prosperity.⁸¹ But failure only became inevitable because social and religious developments destroyed the basis of this movement. The political awakening of the peasantry and the increasing social tensions of rural Ireland, rendered even more explosive by the French Revolution, made compromise with the Catholic middle classes ineffective. Moreover, the fact that modernization did not substantially diminish religious tensions in Ireland but instead led to a new, second confessionalization,⁸² put paid to the idea of a united nation under the leadership of the old élite.

After the Union the Ascendancy was largely content to accept a British or imperial identity, reinforced by a new sense of mission, which had been lacking in the later eighteenth-century Empire. An ideology of British cultural

⁸¹ For "economic Patriotism" see SMYTH, *Men of No Property* (above n. 36), pp. 82, 125, and FOSTER, *Ireland* (above n. 2), pp. 253 f. Significantly even Speaker Foster, opposed on many questions to Grattan, supported the aims of "economic Patriotism" (MALCOLMSON, *Foster* [above n. 40], pp. XIX f, 37 ff).

⁸² MILLER, *Presbyterianism* (above n. 75), IDEM, *Armagh Troubles* (above n. 73), and BOWEN, *Crusade* (above n. 75). For the role of the church at the end of the 18th century in England see D. HEMPTON, *Religion in British society*, in: J. BLACK (ed.), *British Politics and Society from Walpole to Pitt 1742-1789*, Basingstoke 1990, pp. 201-222, with further bibliographical references.

superiority closely connected with evangelical Protestantism gave substance to imperial unity. Thus the demands made by Bishop Woodward in the 1780s, when he had proclaimed a community of law, property and religion as the necessary foundation of the connection between Ireland and England, were fulfilled.⁸³

⁸³ For this new sense of imperial identity and its confessional foundations see C. A. BAYLY, *Imperial Meridian. The British Empire and the World 1780-1830*, London 1989, pp. 136-155; cf. J. OSTERHAMMEL, *China und die Weltgesellschaft*, München 1989, pp. 137 f, and R. HYAM, *Britain's Imperial Century 1815-1914*, London 1976, p. 38, on the combination of the evangelical missionary campaign with utilitarian attempts to spread "civilization" through education. See also W. STODDARD, Religion and the doctrine of nationalism in England at the time of the French revolution and Napoleonic wars, in: S. MEWS (ed.), *Religion and National Identity (Studies in Church History 18)*, Oxford 1982, pp. 381-397. For the participation of the Ascendancy in imperial expansion after the 1790s: BAYLY, *Meridian*, pp. 126-128, and p. 134 f, for the part played in this process by the gentry of the British periphery in general. See further CULLEN, *Emergence* (above n. 36), pp. 128-130, for the disappearance of the minor gentry in Ireland after 1800 - members of this group increasingly sought a career in imperial administration and in the armed forces of Britain and India.