

ANTI-CATHOLICISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND,
1600–1998

Also by John D. Brewer

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THE ROYAL IRISH CONSTABULARY: An Oral History

Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland, 1600–1998

The Mote and the Beam

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Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Wilt thou say to thy brother, 'let me pull out the mote out of thine eye'; and behold, a beam is in thine own eye. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye: and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

(Matthew 7:3–5)

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Jonathan Swift, the well-known eighteenth-century satirist and Irishman, once said that Ireland had enough religion to make its citizens hate, but not enough to make them love one another. On a day in April 1997, when the Irish Republican Army (IRA) shot a woman, with three young children, in the back in a deliberate and cold-blooded attempt to kill her, I realised then, if I had not before, the extent of the hatred some people in Ireland feel for those with whom they disagree politically. Critics of the IRA understandably made much of shooting. That she was a policewoman did not alter the principle, as these critics saw it, that the IRA believe that political causes are progressed by shooting women, and in the back at that. The incident further nurtured the hatred some people feel toward the IRA. The following month a policeman was kicked to death by a frenzied mob, egged on by women in the crowd whose sense and reason was consumed by hatred for the victim – a father of three young children, one of whom is disabled – because he helped to deny them what they saw as their right to march in orange sashes and bowler hats through a Catholic district. This book is about such contempt and hatred, but exclusively that shown toward Catholics and the Catholic Church by some of the very Protestants who condemn the IRA and yet who themselves kill policemen. It is no surprise that the one hatred feeds on the other, and the book is written in the hope that exploring the sociological processes and historical dynamics of one set of hatreds will make everyone examine the beam in their own eye, as Christ put it, before judging the mote in their neighbour's.

The Biblical reference to motes and beams in the title is deliberate. Many Protestants allege that Catholics have beams in their eyes in the way they are supposed to look at Protestants, as reflected in the allegations, for example, that Catholics are anti-Protestant, and in claims about Protestant ethnic cleansing, and the supposed extirpation of Protestants on the island of Ireland. However, what many see in the eyes of their Catholic neighbours is shaped by the beam in their own eyes, represented by anti-Catholicism. The purpose of this book, therefore, is not to give both sides of a story – the tragedy of Northern Ireland has been told many times – but to challenge the Protestant community about anti-Catholicism. It is not motivated by anti-Protestantism; I am a Christian and believe in salvation through faith in Jesus and that justification comes through grace. I do not believe that the Reformation was a mistake; nor do I claim that all Protestants are anti-Catholic or that anti-Protestantism does not exist, but that its scale and intensity are different and it has not permeated the social and cultural structures of Northern Ireland so systematically, or to anywhere near the same level, or for as long. Anti-Protestantism exists as a negative discourse and a set of pejorative beliefs amongst some Catholics, but it has not defined a type of society. Anti-Catholicism, however, is one (and only

one) of the tap-roots of sectarianism and has shaped a whole social structure for centuries.

There are other motivations to the study which also have nothing to do with any alleged anti-Protestantism. As a Christian sociologist I am puzzled to understand the processes which make some believers in Jesus treat and perceive other human beings so unjustly and inhumanely. Perhaps above all, the book is motivated by the wish to apply to Northern Ireland one of the truths spoken by Nelson Mandela. Mandela was a man who had every reason to hate after a quarter of a century spent in prison – much the same length of time as the current period of civil unrest in Ulster – but he emerged to work tirelessly for peace and reconciliation. One of his remarks is telling for Northern Ireland. He once said that if one genuinely wished to negotiate an end to violence with one's opponent, it is necessary to place oneself in their position, to understand how they think and what locates their attitudes and beliefs. This book is intended to convey to Protestants what it is like to be subjected to anti-Catholicism, so that they can better understand what motivates many Catholics to want to change society, and to convey to Catholics the social and political processes which cause some Protestants to be anti-Catholic, so that they can better understand Protestant fears and anxieties.

The research on which the book is based was originally suggested to me over lunch by the Rev. Ken Newell, a good friend, pastor and counsellor, who has long sought to ensure that people in Northern Ireland see each other clearly, with eyes free from all beams and motes. The book is a dedication to his tirelessness and passion for reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants. The research on which it is based was funded by the Central Community Relations Unit in Northern Ireland and the European Union's Physical and Social Environment Programme, where Marguerite Eagan acted as a kind and helpful intercessor. I am grateful for their permission to publish the findings of the research, the small report on which was entitled 'The Roots of Sectarianism'. The Rev. John Dunlop kindly read the report and we are grateful for his comments. The views expressed are our own, not those of the Central Community Relations Unit. Gareth Higgins was employed as Research Assistant on the project and he collected some of the data. Both of us are Christians and sociologists, and much enjoyed our collaboration in applying both sets of principles to an understanding of an aspect of Northern Irish society. Gareth wrote a draft of the Postscript and while I wrote the rest of this volume, I am happy to acknowledge Gareth's positive contribution throughout by co-authorship of the book.

Several people and organisations helped us in the research – by agreeing to be interviewed, by helping to establish contacts and set up interviews, and by commenting on written work and assisting in numerous other ways – and we acknowledge their contribution with very grateful thanks: Cecil Andrews, Dr Esmond Birnie, Professor Paul Bew, Professor Steve Bruce, Jimmy Drumm, David Ervine, Dr Bernie Hayes, Professor David Hempton, Rev. Professor Finlay Holmes, Dr Liam Kennedy, the Linenhall Library, Pastor Kenny McClinton, Cyril McMaster, Gary McMichael, Sharon McMullan, Rev. Ken Newell, Fr. Eddie O'Donnell SJ, Professor Liam

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*John D. Brewer
February 1998*

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