

Part II

Sociological Features of Contemporary Anti-Catholicism

Part I has attempted to show that anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland is a sociological process for the production of different rights, opportunities and material rewards between people in a society where religious labels are used to define group boundaries. However, to fully understand and locate a sociological process, more is necessary than simply explaining its origins and use in terms of the 'social item' it produces, for it is also important to describe its character and form as they help to produce this social item. It is thus important to outline the types of contemporary anti-Catholicism and identify the ways in which they produce social stratification and social closure. An analysis of contemporary articulations of anti-Catholicism demonstrates that it has distinct modes. Not all function as resources in this manner but the main types, called the covenantal and secular modes, produce social stratification and social closure within a distinct cultural milieu. Anti-Catholicism does not operate as a resource to produce these social items in every society, for it is demarcated by a cultural context in which theology can stand for and represent other sorts of differences and conflicts between people.

It might be doubted that there are distinct types of anti-Catholicism, since from the beginning of the nineteenth century, conservative evangelicalism has provided the sacred canopy around Protestants when their identity seemed to be under threat from local Catholics, the British, or Anglo-Irish relations generally, and this casts anti-Catholicism in a single form. The canopy first appeared in the 1830s at the time of Catholic emancipation and other events, and it showed itself forcefully whenever people's Britishness and Protestantism seemed under threat from their antinomies (Irishness and Catholicism respectively), such as during debates about Home Rule and partition, the O'Neill period, and throughout 'the troubles'. Conservative evangelicalism offers a secure identity in its very strong invocation of the two defining tenets of that identity, Britishness and Protestantism, which is attractive when either seems threatened. This accounts in the modern period for the appeal of Paisleyism (see Bruce, 1986, 1994; Wallis et al. 1986; Akenson, 1992) and explains why his Free Presbyterian Church, established in 1951, languished until O'Neillism emerged in the mid-1960s (Bruce, 1994: 19).

However, this is not to argue that conservative evangelicalism is the preferred form of religious expression for Protestants, nor that all Protestants are religious. It means only that conservative evangelicalism successfully articulates an identity, and people can buy into the identity it constructs – Britishness and Protestantism – during a crisis or threat even if they are not themselves conservative evangelicals or religious (a similar point is made by Bruce, 1994: 25). Wright (1973) has shown that secular Protestants, who are not churchgoers themselves, none the less still impart the conservative evangelical tradition to their children by insisting on attendance at Sunday Schools and membership of youth brigades, and would themselves have attended the same and imbibed the symbols, myths and paraphernalia of evangelicalism. They may now be uncertain or marginal believers but Wright argued that they see ‘belief as a “good thing”, something to be valued’, even if for others (1993: 245–6). Wallis et al. likewise argue (1986: 5) that secular Protestants in Northern Ireland are attached to the symbols of religion despite their own low level of church participation because they are so exposed to conservative evangelicalism. In part this is also because there are no alternative lines of division other than religion in Northern Ireland around which to construct identity, as Bruce later argued (1994: 28), so closely do religion, politics, nationhood and locality coincide; the simple zero-sum is a binary game. There are ‘Bible Protestants’, the religious fundamentalists like the Free Presbyterians and the small gospel-hall-goers, who would be conservative evangelicals, but it is the identity conservative evangelicalism constructs that *most* people find appealing rather than conservative evangelicalism itself (a similar point is made by Bell, 1990: 64). This explains why Paisley, for example, attracts support well beyond the numbers in his church and amongst people whose ethics, beliefs and behaviour are not religious, let alone evangelical (see Wallis et al., 1986: 25; for comments made by Protestant youth which illustrate this, see Bell, 1990: 164).

Notwithstanding this powerful argument, however, conservative evangelicalism is not the sole rallying cry for Ulster Protestants. Because it is an identity that most people are buying into rather than conservative evangelicalism itself, there are alternative sources from which people can purchase this pro-British, pro-Union identity, such as secular forms of militant Loyalism and secular Unionism. In what is now a very popular duality, Todd (1987) contrasted Ulster Loyalist and Ulster British identities, the former seeing themselves as Ulster Protestants first and British second; the latter, vice versa (for another attempt to classify types of Unionist identity see Porter, 1996; on developments within what he calls ‘new Unionism’, see O’Dowd, 1998). Porter (1996: xi) has argued that the former identity, which he calls ‘cultural unionism’, exaggerates Protestantism as an identity marker. However, Ulster Loyalists are divided between what Bruce (1994: 2) calls the evangelicals and the gunmen; that is, the conservative evangelicals and the secular Loyalists, for whom Protestantism is an ethnic and social identity rather than a theological commitment. The Ulster British identity on the other hand valorises Britishness and, if not secular, is liberal in its Protestantism, and mostly puts a hermetic seal between religion and politics. Porter (1996: xi) described it as ‘liberal unionism’ and said

that it stripped Unionism of its Protestantism, aspiring to a liberal politics in common with the rest of the United Kingdom, in which religion is kept out of public life. In secular forms of Unionism and Loyalism, the defence of the Union is inviolate but their articulation of the other trait historically important to Protestants, their Protestantism, is underplayed or is nominal, ensuring that they have difficulty in appealing to 'Bible Protestants', leaving them with a constituency for whom Protestantism is less central to their identity. Bruce (1994) argues that it is for this reason that conservative evangelicalism is the most attractive and popular articulation of identity because it puts value on both Protestantism and Britishness, and resonates with the high levels of religiosity in Northern Ireland. But not all Protestants are religious, nor do all see the two tenets as indissoluble or value them equally, and competing sources of identity construction challenge the dominance of conservative evangelicalism.

Empirical data on identity amongst Protestants focuses on national identity, a narrower issue, but some findings are revealing. Reviewing the survey evidence on Protestant national identity since 1968, Trew (1996: 142) shows that the proportion of Protestants describing themselves as 'British' rose from 39 to 71 per cent between 1968 and 1994, with a similar reduction in those describing themselves as 'Irish' or 'Ulster', the latter falling from 32 to 11 per cent. This reflects the polarisation that occurred during 'the troubles' and the security many Protestants found in Britishness as an identity. Analysing 1994 data from the Northern Ireland Social Attitude Survey on national identity, Breen shows that four-fifths of Protestants defined their national identity as either 'British' or 'Ulster', only 3 per cent said 'Irish' (Breen, 1996: 37). Of the 'British' or 'Ulster' identifiers, 94 per cent supported Union. He concludes that irrespective of any differences between 'British' or 'Ulster' identities, in their constitutional preferences they are the same (*ibid.*: 45). Thus, if Protestantism is not necessarily a strong source of identity among secular Unionists and Loyalists, Britishness and the Union is. Union is important to other Protestants, however, precisely because it is indissoluble from Protestantism, while to others it is less important than Protestantism, some of whom would wish to remain British only in so far as Britain remained Protestant. This is relevant to anti-Catholicism because it is a mistake to see it as monolithic in character, associated only with the tradition of conservative evangelicalism. Protestants can construct their identity from other sources, religious or secular, and anti-Catholicism remains an important part of that identity, although it takes on a different form than in conservative evangelicalism. In short, anti-Catholicism is still integral to secular forms of Protestant identity.

Anti-Catholicism is a general cultural motif in Northern Ireland, with strong historical roots and many contemporary cultural representations, from Orange marches, doctrinal statements of faith by churches, to graffiti on gable walls. It is something which can be internalised without forethought, and reproduced unthinkingly in language – 'Taigs', 'Fenians', 'Papists', 'fuck the Pope' – because it is represented in so much cultural iconography, such as paintings, murals, poems, songs, writings, and painted kerbstones. It is reproduced on Orange Order banners, in church

hymnals, and by means of tattoos – ‘Remember 1690’, ‘No Surrender’, ‘UVF’ can be seen on some bare-chested torsos. It is part of the sectarian culture of the place – it seeps into the very pores of the province – and like many cultural symbols it can be imbibed unreflexively, without thought or systematic formulation, and reproduced unthinkingly in language with no malicious or discriminatory intent. Where anti-Catholicism is unsystematic at the level of ideas and not reflected in behaviour it can be described as ‘passive anti-Catholicism’: the kind that some Protestants have transmitted to them as part of their social learning but which remains as a cultural backdrop, rarely articulated or enacted. ‘Active anti-Catholicism’ is something different and represents a fully formulated structure of ideas, language and behaviour. It is this kind that anti-Catholicism that is addressed in the typology.

Three types of active anti-Catholicism are distinguishable, called the covenantal, secular and Pharisaic modes. They are empirical rather than ideal types. That is, they exist as real types used by real people, although they are not pure types in that an individual’s anti-Catholicism is rarely composed of just one. However, they do have a ‘primary constituency’ to which the type mainly appeals. They are systems of real belief and action, and they have an identifiable structure and form, as represented in Figure 3.

Each mode has a common structure, with its own set of foundational ideas on which it is premised, using a characteristic form of rhetoric by which to express anti-Catholicism; each emphasises different things in the articulation of anti-Catholicism, appeals to a different primary constituency and has different implications for relationships with Catholics. A summary of the three modes is reproduced in Figure 4.

It was argued in the Introduction that anti-Catholicism has political and theological dimensions, which were presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 1 (p. 4). The modes stress the political and theological dimensions of anti-Catholicism in different proportion, as shown in Figure 5. This diagram neatly captures the paradox of anti-

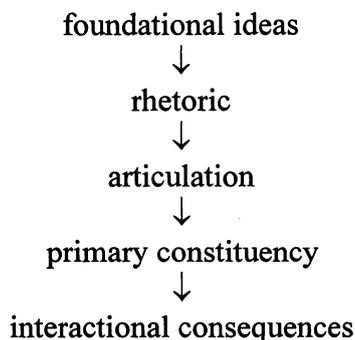


Figure 3 The structure of the three modes of anti-Catholicism

Catholicism in Northern Ireland, in that it can be grounded in an interpretation of Scripture (covenantal and Pharisaic modes), which may (covenantal mode) or may not (Pharisaic mode) have political expression, and also be relatively devoid of theology and highly political (secular mode), emphasising an approach to the Union much like one of the more theological modes (the covenantal). This highlights the point that although they are empirical rather than ideal types, they do not exist in pure form in people’s language and behaviour because there is overlap in the concerns of each mode and people articulate this cross-over in their own version of anti-Catholicism. There is cross-over, for example, between the anti-Catholicism of, say, Paisley and militant Loyalists: Paisley incorporates both covenantal and secular modes, while militant Loyalists usually draw on the secular mode and

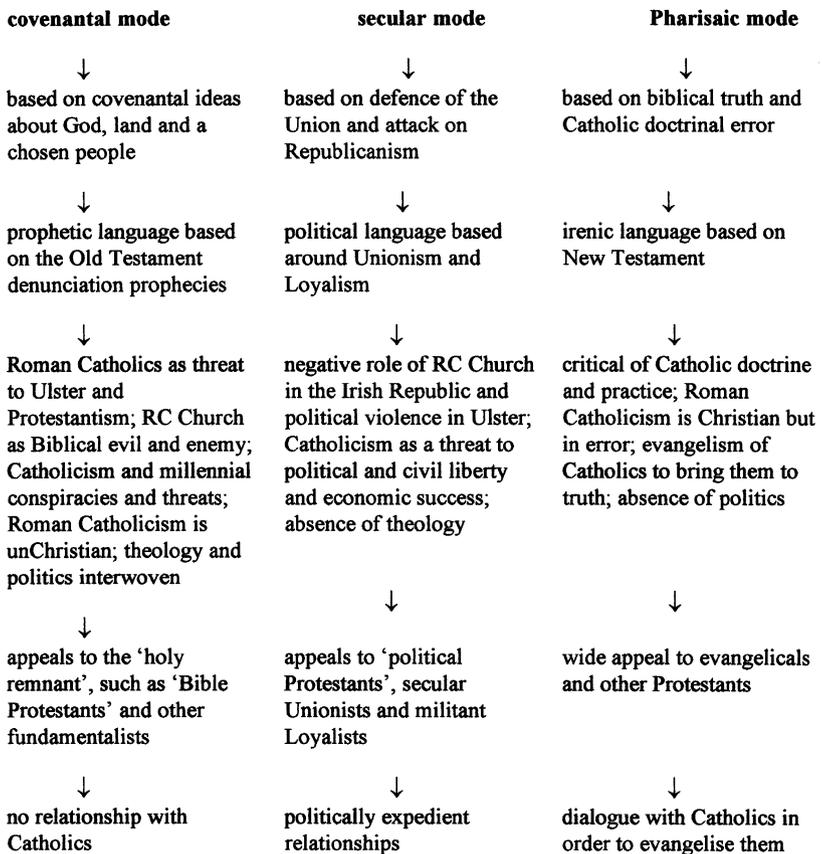


Figure 4 The three modes of anti-Catholicism

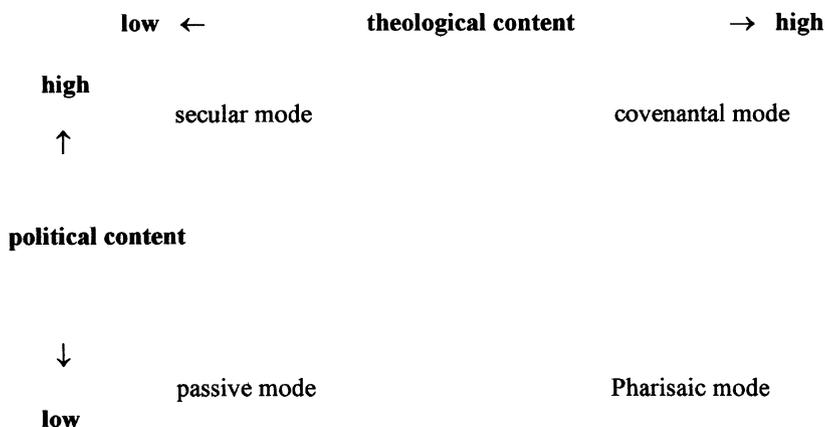


Figure 5 Plotting the modes of anti-Catholicism along the two axes

borrow very rarely from Paisley's theological ideas. Other points follow from the schema in Figure 5. The different primary constituencies to which each mainly appeals points to the fragmentation within Protestantism between the political and theological, the secular and religious modes of expression and sources of identity, which challenges the notion that conservative evangelicalism is the sole or primary source of identity. Second, the implications each type has for establishing relationships with Catholics illustrates the difficulties ahead for peace and compromise during the second ceasefire unless there is a decommissioning of Protestant mind-sets as well as of Republican arms. Part II identifies the modes of anti-Catholicism and addresses some of the sociological features which underlie them and by means of which the modes help to produce social stratification and social closure. These features include examination of the common-sense reasoning processes which support anti-Catholicism, the 'cognitive map' on which it is based, and the sociological dynamics of the language used to express it.