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### Fighting Like the Devil for the Sake of God: Protestants, Catholics and the Origins of Violence in Victorian Belfast, by Mark Doyle

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**Fighting Like the Devil for the Sake of God: Protestants, Catholics and the Origins of Violence in Victorian Belfast**, by Mark Doyle; pp. xii + 296. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009, £60.00, £18.99 paper, \$89.95, \$32.95 paper.

A memorable *Punch* cartoon published during the Northern Ireland “Troubles,” depicts a scene of lions and Christians in the Roman Coliseum. Rather than fighting the lions, the

Christians are fighting each other. Two lions, off to one side, look on at the great melee and comment: "Oh dear, not the *Irish* Christians again" (qtd. in Akenson, *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, 1815–1922* [McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988], i). Sectarian violence in Ireland is not as old as Roman times; it can just seem that way.

Mark Doyle's engaging study of sectarian conflict in mid-nineteenth-century Belfast seeks to explain the modern tradition of violence that shaped Protestant-Catholic relations in that city. Doyle argues that Belfast's tradition of sectarian violence emerged during the 1850s and 1860s, a period of tumultuous change shaped by the forces of urbanization, industrialization, Catholic migration, and Protestant evangelicalism. That there were so many sectarian riots in Belfast, lasting from days to weeks in duration, suggests that violence had become endemic, embedded in the city's social fabric.

Previous studies of Belfast violence have focused primarily on the ideological and structural forces that shaped relations between Catholics and Protestants—disagreements over religion and politics coupled with the structural inequalities in power and employment. While these explanations are foundational to understanding sectarian conflict, they do not adequately account for why the violence became endemic rather than sporadic. Other analyses, Doyle asserts, do not explain why sectarian hostility was expressed through violence rather than by some other means, although he does not suggest what other non-violent means might have been utilized to vent or channel sectarian antagonism. For all of the stereotypes and caricatures of the Irish in Victorian popular culture, there was more interpersonal violence in Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom, and recreational violence (in the form of faction fights) was a cultural tradition still alive in the 1850s and 1860s. Given a tradition of communal justice and recreational violence, an urban society with structural inequalities, and significantly, a large minority population, it would be rather more surprising than Doyle hypothesizes to imagine "a society in which people holding conflicting religious or political views coexist peacefully" (8).

The great strength of Doyle's analysis of Belfast violence is his emphasis on and elucidation of the key networks or relationships that shaped and gave meaning to communal rivalries and were thus instrumental in embedding the violent traditions of sectarian conflict. For confessional groups, fraternal organizations, political alliances, religious bodies, and kinship ties were instrumental in shaping attitudes and identity—but more importantly to help understand the pattern of sectarian violence, they were also highly influential in fanning or (far less commonly) extinguishing initial sectarian sparks. A small, localized incident might reverberate across these webs of social networks and trigger a massive, sustained, violent reaction, linking neighbourhoods across the city.

Institutional Catholicism was not a particularly moderating influence in Belfast during this time because of its weak presence. In 1857 Belfast had only nine priests for a congregation of forty thousand Catholics; had it been stronger, the Catholic Church might have been a restraining influence on sectarian violence. Its very weakness allowed Ribbonism to take root in working-class neighborhoods, and secret societies were clearly not moderating influences on sectarianism. The Orange Order was a widespread, influential social network cutting across Protestant class divisions; by promoting anti-Catholicism and defending Protestant identity, it could enflame sectarian antagonism and violence.

In addition to these social networks within Belfast, Doyle examines the

relations between community and state: Catholics and the city government, and Protestants and Dublin Castle. At the local level, the economic, social, and political powerlessness of Catholics alienated them from the local government at the very time when the timid leadership of Bishop Cornelius Denvir sought to maintain the status quo by seeking not to antagonize city officials or the Protestant community. Doyle argues that agents of the central government—which was represented by magistrates and most importantly, the Irish Constabulary—were unable to prevent or contain the sectarian violence because they lacked legitimacy in the eyes of Protestants who resented Dublin Castle's increasing intervention into Belfast affairs. As local officials could clearly not quell or control sectarian violence, this led to new and more repressive policing strategies. Where local officials sought a balance between keeping the peace and allowing flammable free speech, the Irish Constabulary erred on the side of order.

Doyle takes an interesting methodological approach in chapter 7, examining Irish sectarianism in Glasgow and asking why sectarian violence there tended to be localized and short-lived. Glasgow, in various significant ways, resembled Belfast—high levels of Irish Catholic migration, widespread Protestant evangelicalism and anti-Catholic belligerency, similar occupational and economic rivalries, and so on—yet sectarian violence did not emerge on a similar scale in the Scottish city. For example, because of the absence in Glasgow of the sort of communal networks that facilitated violence in Belfast, bigots tended to remain marginalized. Additional restraining influences, such as a stronger institutional Catholic Church, moderated anger and controlled its outlets among Catholic Glaswegians. For Doyle, however, the main difference was the Protestant mindset in each city; Glasgow Protestants were secure in their place in society and nation, whereas Belfast Protestants were not. In Glasgow the state's legitimacy was never seriously in question, whereas in Belfast it was continually.

The book's final chapters, one on collective memories of violence and a four-page epilogue, are the weakest in an otherwise very cogently argued, enlightening, and important book. Doyle's discussion on the transmission of the memory of sectarian violence, using sketches and broadside ballads, could be more effective. The two prints commemorating events of the 1864 riots he discusses do not appear to be as informative as Doyle would like, and both were likely produced for Protestant consumers. It would have been more illuminating to have the same event remembered from the perspective of both the Catholic and Protestant communities. The least satisfying part of the book's structure is its lack of conclusion; the one-page summary at the close of the collective memory chapter is not sufficient to tie the various strands of Doyle's analysis together.

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