

# From Confessionalism to Sociability: Catholic Historians in Protestant Ireland in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

Toshio Tsunoda

In the intellectual history of eighteenth-century Ireland, generally speaking, Catholic thinkers tend to be neglected with main researches concentrated on deist republicanism and Protestant political thoughts, such as Molyneux's patriotism and Presbyterian radicalism from Hutcheson to the United Irishmen. Historians seemingly tend to study eighteenth-century Irish politics in terms of the influences of the American and French Revolutions. But we find a few remarkable studies of Charles O'Connor (1710-1791) and John Curry (c. 1710-1780), Catholic historians and pamphleteers who started arguments for the Catholic relief in the 1740s. In her standard study of the development of Catholic Ireland Wall appreciates their commitment to the Catholic cause: they revised the prevalent historiography prejudicial to the Irish nation and promoted the Catholic oath of loyalty to the Protestant establishment.<sup>1)</sup> Hill mentions O'Connor in her suggestive outline of the eighteenth-century Irish historiography and finds in his history a moderate synthesis of the patriots, the Gaelic enthusiasts and the 'enlightened' Catholics; its essence was Enlightenment historiography with the ideological intention to unify the Irish denominations around the Whig establishment and rapport with England.<sup>2)</sup> A recent book-length study by Leighton is informative; it interprets O'Connor and Curry

as critics of the Irish *ancien régime*, showing that their modern separation of politics from religion was a radical challenge to the confessional state.<sup>3)</sup> This interpretation seems to pinpoint the significance of their political discourses. But it seems that their separation was not so clear-cut or straightforward and that the relation of church and state was not their sole concern.

So it would be possible to modify the interpretation by asking what specific difficulties and limitations their distinction of politics and religion involved and how their secular politics should be connected with their history of Irish civilization. After contrasting confessionalism of earlier Irish Catholics and their new moderate approach, I will examine how prevalent prejudices on both sides of Irish denominations and their own religious commitment made it hard to make a persuasive purely political discourse separated from religious concerns. Then I would suggest that sociability and polite manners in the private sphere were providing a free society beyond the public bond of church and state in their politics and history.<sup>4)</sup> While they tried to make politics free from confessional conflicts, they did not demand political participation and power for Catholics. Their goal seems to have been rather apolitical: circumventing the Protestant state, Catholics would enjoy economic and cultural improvements without any harassment of religious discrimination. Their pamphlets and historical writings might be considered as a sort of polite literature intended to help people to get over prejudices which they thought were the social foundation of the penal laws.

## I Catholics and the Protestant State

Radical ideological conflicts about the Irish civil and ecclesiastical establishment in the early eighteenth century reveal confessionalism of the Irish state, which O'Connor and Curry were to challenge later. Though it is not easy to find political opinions of dispossessed laymen in the turn of the century, some manuscript Jacobite histories of the Jacobite wars, 'A Light to the Blind', purporting to give light to the English blind to justice so that they should regret their sinful conduct to the Stuart king, show that the disputes on religion, politics and property could not be separated. The author hoped the French victory, the Stuart restoration and the restitution of land to the Catholics. At the same time he was a 'patriot' in his aspiration for Irish independence of England in law, justice and trade.<sup>5)</sup> Two books of hostile Catholics of the previous century were republished and presumably appealed to the Irish Catholic mind and exasperated the ruling Protestants. Richard Archdekin's *A Letter from an English Gentleman* (1751), originally written in the 1660s, denounced Cromwell's confiscation of Irish land and the unfair land settlement after the Restoration to warn that the security of the Protestant interests in Ireland would require the utter destruction of the natives. His main point was 'the unquestionable Right, and lawful Title the Natives have to those Estates'.<sup>6)</sup> Another book is Hugh Reilly's *The Impartial History of Ireland* (originally published as *Ireland's Case Briefly Stated* in the 1690s) went through several editions. Denouncing prejudicial historiography by English Protestants, he justified the Irish Rebellion of 1641 as provoked by the Protestant deliberate persecution and criticized the land settlement

after the Restoration as failing to make restitution to the loyal Catholics. His Catholicism was never compatible with Protestantism as he reduced Protestantism to a mere ideology, observing sarcastically that for Protestants 'Gain is great Godliness' and that their motivation of Irish conversion was land confiscation.<sup>7</sup>

A less intransigent opinion was expressed by Cornelius Nary, a Dublin priest, when he criticized a bill of the penal laws in 1724. The bill was intended to have prohibited any Catholic priest refusing to take the oath of abjuration from saying mass. Nary was 'a sort of unofficial representative of the Catholics of Dublin' and started a dialogue with moderate Protestants in the Irish Parliament.<sup>8</sup> He was different from the Jacobites in his acceptance of the Hanoverian succession; he admitted that William III was a *de facto* king because a conqueror acquires a right to subjects' obedience by the laws of nature and nations and he proposed Catholics' oath of allegiance to George I. This oath was, in his view, sufficient for guaranteeing Catholic civil obedience, and he was reluctant to renounce a prospective Stuart monarch, thinking that the oath of abjuration was unnecessary.<sup>9</sup> While in real politics he was able to accommodate himself to the establishment, in principle he remained Jacobite. His arguments against the penal laws prove his practicality. First, they were a clear breach of the tolerant Articles of Limerick. A second reason of his opposition was that the bill was 'Unpolitick': it would frustrate the English entreaty for toleration of Protestant population in the Catholic states; it would encourage emigration to the detriment of Irish industry; toleration would be a more effective method of securing Catholics' loyalty. He asked Protestants 'to give us the same Liberty and Freedom, as our Fellow

Subjects have, to use our Industry and enjoy the Fruits thereof; let no distinction be made.<sup>10</sup> His arguments were based on the secular economic interests of the Protestant elites; he wanted them to reconsider the Catholic question in such secular terms.

What were the Irish Protestants' assumptions about church and state? The Church of Ireland, Connolly observes, had an important role in instilling the government authority into the people's mind and in turn the latter supported the former by its coercive sanctions, so they were 'interlocking and mutually reinforcing parts of a single, organic whole'. He cites a document of 1693 requiring a regal visitation for ecclesiastical reform:

It is most evident from the principle of religion, the dictates of natural wisdom and policy, and the observation of regular practice, that there is such a golden chain of participation of symbols linking the ecclesiastical state with the civil, in all well-ordered constitutions of Christian governments, and consequently so great a connection of interest and concern betwixt them, that the due administration of the jurisdiction of the one, doth as mainly conduce to the advancement and establishment of the other, as abuses, neglects and corruptions growing in the one produce inconveniencies and disturbances to the other.<sup>11</sup>

Ireland was thus a confessional state identical with the church and the series of penal laws were the stark, ostentacious representatives of the coercive sanctions. But historical revisionism advises us not to exaggerate their social and economic effects because of their ineffectiveness and evasions; in fact churchmen in the 1750s ceased to expect the civil power to repress their rivals by the laws, and they only

wanted to preserve their status of the national church by 'a façade of unenforceable laws'.<sup>12)</sup> So we should say that their façade as well as effectiveness mattered and that they at least demonstrated the state's commitment to support the church even if it did not repress Catholics effectively.

It would be possible to conceive two opposite versions of the reciprocity of church and state: one is the popery or the High Church principle that state is subject to church; another is the Erastian principle that church is subject to state. The first allows the churchmen to use political power for persecution of other sects, so there is little possibility of toleration. The second regards religion only as a means of politics, so it may consider pluralism of churches as expedient if enforcement of the established church proves to be destructive of political order and other churches do not threaten the state. So the second version of the national church with toleration of nonconformists may be able to get over confessionalism, separating religion and politics. The Irish establishment of church and state seems to belong to the second version in its practical administration. It came to tolerate Catholicism as distinct from popery; the government ceased to use the penal laws about Catholic ecclesiastics and the exercise of religion from around the mid-1720s with the laws excluding Catholics from property and political power remaining enforceable.<sup>13)</sup>

Some churchmen combined the general principle of toleration based on freedom of private conscience and the justification of the penal laws against political popery. Archbishop Synge, preaching in the House of Commons on the anniversary of the Irish Rebellion in 1725, denied that either the Church of Rome or Hobbes's 'the supreme civil power' was a

judge of religious truth: 'all persons in a society, whose principles in religion have no tendency to hurt the publick, have a right to a toleration.'<sup>14</sup> Here he followed a Lockian theory that religion should be confined into private sphere of conscience and it should be tolerated unless it interferes in politics. Specifically he examined whether the Church of Ireland should tolerate a religion containing principles which had disturbed and could disturb the public peace, and his conclusion was 'a limited toleration under the Direction of the civil magistrate': because everyone has a natural right to worship God as his conscience dictates; and toleration is more prudent and convenient than persecution.<sup>15</sup> We should notice that despite his idea of toleration his reservation fully justified the penal laws destroying Catholic property and political power<sup>16</sup> and that toleration meant the government regulation of Catholic religion. But his argument suggests the logical possibility that the penal laws might be repealed if the Irish Catholics convinced the Protestant rulers that they renounced any claim to politics. An attitude similar to Synge's is found in another sermon on the same anniversary in 1731: 'All subjects who have the misfortune to differ from the establish'd religion, ought to be treated with as much lenity on account of the religious errors, whatever they be, as is consistent with the welfare and security of the government.'<sup>17</sup> While such sermons were seemingly intended to attribute the penal laws to popery and thereby lessen uncomfortableness which Protestants felt in their persecuting laws, the sermons suggest that some churchmen began to think in terms of separation of religion and politics. After the failure of the last Jacobite rebellion of 1745 the clergy of the Church of Ireland began to address themselves condescendingly to their Catholic

parishioners, insisting on benefits which they received under the 'mild and gentle government'.<sup>18)</sup> Though the Protestant regime did not mention the repeal of the penal laws, they stopped regarding Catholics as an irreconcilable enemy and tried to comprehend them, though not with full citizenship, in the regime instead of excluding them.

## II The Civil Constitution and Conscience

The confessional conflicts between the Irish Protestant state and Jacobitism were ceasing to be relevant in the mid-eighteenth century and enlightened Catholics reasonably expected that the liberal establishment would admit toleration if they showed themselves to be no longer political dissidents. O'Connor and Curry were such enlightened Catholics, making the first public statements of the repeal of the penal laws. As tactful pamphleteers, they were obliged to pretend to be 'a moderate Protestant' to comply with persistent prejudices against popery: 'the pamphlet is given as the effort of an obnoxious party, no good can come out of it. Such is the temper of the present times, I think it now vain for a Roman Catholic to write a syllable on our penal laws.'<sup>19)</sup> So they always wrote their political pamphlets as anonymous Protestants enlightening their coreligionists. The main point of their discourse was Catholics' allegiance to the civil constitution. The Catholic Association, whose founding members they were, made a point of making an oath of loyalty to the monarch as O'Connor advised that 'we should make a tender of our loyalty to the king; give him a test of political orthodoxy and petition for the repeal of the penal and punitive laws.'<sup>20)</sup> This tactics appears to be no problematical, yet it presupposed separation of ecclesiastical and civil constitutions, which



meant a denial of a confessional state. Irish Catholics' abjuration of the Pope's civil power must be accompanied by the Irish state's separation from the Church of Ireland. In O'Connor's vision the state would enjoy more extensive support by including different churches even if it lost religious unity:

Our government and constitution, our interest and tranquility require that our power should be established on the broad base of all parties, civil and religious; I mean those parties only, whose spiritual doctrines are no way incompatible with the prosperity or security of their country, although their legal incapacities may be found incompatible with both.—Union in politics and morals is our best and only resource, when an union in spirituals is so fatally impracticable; nor can the British dominions ever possess all the advantages intended in the scheme of the British constitution, until every good subject, who revered this constitution, can profess the religion of his conscience with impunity.<sup>21)</sup>

O'Connor's vision of the secular constitution separated from church was surely a challenge to 'the ideological centre and strongpoint of their country's *ancien régime*'.<sup>22)</sup> His secularism is well expressed by his interesting use of a word 'political philosophy'<sup>23)</sup>, which means a learning about political obedience, detached from confessional concerns. The separation seems to be a part of modernization programm of economic development, in which a nation of once irreconcilable churches would unite to participate. The repeal of the penal laws would interest Catholics in the establishment and encourage their industry and this would result in the promotion of the secularized Protestant interest, that is economic prosperity which should not be sacrificed for

theological disputes.<sup>24)</sup> Thus summarized, O'Connor and Curry seem to submit a fairly reasonable persuasion, but the facts were not so easy. Neither Catholics nor Protestants welcomed their pamphlets, and O'Connor tried not to be discouraged by it: 'Was not the writer of *The Case of th R[oman] C[atholic]s* abused by friends and enemies, but had he not in a great degree the approbation of the honest and wise of both parties...?'<sup>25)</sup> His secular politics is theoretically significant but in reality it may not have been persuasive in the face of prejudice and religiosity of both denominations. As he himself said, 'With regard to the administration, I believe you will allow that none can be more indulgent than the present'<sup>26)</sup>, so the government knew better than to execute all the penal laws. Most Catholics preferred to be silent, putting up with the inconveniences, and O'Connor and Curry were not always representative of Catholics in their active campaign. In fact he did not expect much activity from Catholic aristocrats and clergymen.<sup>27)</sup> On the other hand his argument of allowing Catholics to participate in economic development failed to persuade a Protestant pamphleteer of the expediency of repealing the penal laws. He feared that the result of the repeal would be a resurgence of popery:

In short, as a friend to the Hanoverian succession and to Protestantism, I cannot help opposing any scheme which might invest the Papists with larger liberties than they now possess—by allowing them a landed property they would soon participate in every county and borough in the kingdom—their influence would sway election in proportion to its strength—and their interest would prompt them to have none but their friends elected; ... By enlarging their liberties, and of course increasing their properties,

an equality of power might, in time, be brought about, when, according to this writer's own principles, a right of opposition takes place; thus, our children, in the next century, might feel a repetition of the orthodox massacre of 1641.<sup>28)</sup>

It was generally believed that power followed property, so O'Connor had difficulty in persuading that they did not demand political rights while demanding stable property. It seems that his renouncing political rights not only sounded unconvincing but made his theoretical separation of politics and religion defective; religious considerations still remained in politics in his scheme, in which government would be left in the hands of Protestants with Catholics excluded from it. His remark that 'interesting our Roman-Catholic subjects in a free Protestant governments'<sup>29)</sup> suggests that his perspective was the policy of toleration for the Protestant state. The state would give toleration in exchange for allegiance, and toleration was not mainly based on individuals' natural rights. So his theory of toleration seems not so much Lockian as similar to *politiques* who allowed pluralism of churches for the prior purpose of preserving political society. In fact he did not mention Locke who excluded Catholics from toleration. Though he separated politics from religion, he kept away from politics. This non-civic attitude, partly forced by adverse circumstances, was a characteristic of his Catholic movement; he advised a Catholic to 'acquiesce in the operation of laws which forbid our taking an active part in any matter relative to legislation'.<sup>30)</sup>

Leighton's interpretation of O'Connor as creating a secular political discourse should not mislead us into underplaying his commitment to Catholic religion. He dared to criticize Anglicanism and vindicated the

Pope's spiritual powers, which he thought of as essential for restraining the uncertainty of each private conscience.<sup>31)</sup> It is true that he rejected the Pope's temporal powers and was displeased with bigoted Catholic clergymen maintaining the powers and opposing an oath of abjuration which was contrived by him and Curry and other members of the Catholic Committee. But, when the act of 1774 testifying Catholics' allegiance had an oath differed from the formulary by the Catholic Committee, O'Connor objected to it as unorthodox and demanded amendment; for example he was not happy with the addition in italics in the sentence: '... I do declare that I do not believe that the Pope of Rome or any other foreign prince, *prelate*, state, or potentate hath, or *ought to have* any temporal or civil jurisdiction, power, superiority, or pre-eminence, directly or indirectly, within this realm; ...'<sup>32)</sup> So he presumably did not want to deny the Pope's temporal power in a *de jure* sense. He in fact did not take the oath of this act and was ineligible for benefits of the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 so that he had to defend his estates from his brother's lawsuit. He never suffered his conscience to be subordinate to the state. To reconcile the Catholic religion and the Protestant state by separation seems an elusive solution; they tend to clash at some points as it would be impossible that each has nothing to do with the other.

O'Connor's conciliatory discourse on the Catholic relief involved a critique of the Church of Ireland. But he used the Enlightenment critique of religion rather than opposing Catholic doctrines to Protestantism. The Church's exclusive pretensions to truth, supported by the state force were refuted in his adoption of the languages of scepticism and deism. He remarked, 'the criterion of our ecclesiastical

faith is far from being thus ascertained..., controversy must subsist, until reason and examination can decide.' The Church, however, did not allow a free examination, and needed 'Reformation'. Otherwise, persecution and derangement among the Christian churches would encourage theists: 'They advance, that the religion of nature, which admitteth of no sanguinary contentions, is preferable to Christianity, whose repugnant creeds administer constant fuel to them.'<sup>33)</sup> His quotation of Bolingbroke in this argument naturally did not mean that he agreed with the deist but it was just for a polemical purpose. He found deist critique of the established church tactically useful for the Catholic cause: 'deists without their knowing it serve the Catholic cause by bringing division to such an extreme as must necessarily bring about a return to truths first controverted by men who styled themselves reformers, who in the second place varied from one another in their several local reformations.'<sup>34)</sup> He understood that deism was an extreme development of the Protestant critique of Catholicism, so deism might remind Protestants that their critique of Catholicism was double-edged. Another language he used was that of tradition. In his critical account of the Irish reformation the nation, whose consent was not obtained, had the right to resist 'with the language of the constitution and of nature on their side'. This language was derived from Montesquieu, whose words on toleration policy he quoted: 'when the state is at liberty to receive, or to reject a new religion, it ought to be rejected; when it is received, it ought to be tolerated.'<sup>35)</sup> Irish Catholicism as a social convention could be defended well on this principle. O'Connor's separation of politics from religion did not reduce his concern about religion, and his polemic against the Church of

Ireland was conducted not in a way of theological disputes but in eclectic secular terms of reason and tradition.

### **III Improvement and Politeness**

As we have seen, what O'Connor and Curry meant by union on civil principles did not imply active citizenship of Catholics but rather passive obedience to the civil establishment. What they expected a united Irish nation to be engaged in was economic activities. Their understanding of the penal laws as a major cause of Irish poverty was just the opposite to the Protestant conventional understanding that Catholicism was inimical to economic improvement so the penal laws were a means of Irish development. Samuel Madden, a Protestant social reformer, was convinced that 'it is the Popish religion that is the chief occasion of most of the poverty, idleness, misfortune, and misery which too many of our people languish under', denouncing the Catholic institutions and customs. His proposal was based on confessional outlook: religious pluralism meant political dissensions destructive of economy. Conversion through the penal laws was encouraged as a social and moral transformation of natives. Modernization was Anglicization and Anglicanization as he observed: 'many thousands of our merchants and mechanics being Papists, they grow more moderate in their opinions of Protestants, and as they prefer our manners, languages, and fashions to their own, they seem not unlikely to go a step further, and embrace our religion also.'<sup>36)</sup>

O'Connor was suggesting that religious pluralism within the framework of the civil constitution should be viable. There was a fundamental disagreement on this between him and the Protestant

reformers. Apart from this, he shared an understanding of economic problems of Ireland: the necessity of agrarian reform for securing tenure. In fact Madden and other reformers proposed longer leases by relaxation of the penal laws.<sup>37)</sup> In his proposal of secure tenure for Catholics O'Connor could put his Catholic cause in the legitimate writings of the economic reformers, often quoting Berkeley and Swift to corroborate his assertion that the present problem was poverty rather than popery.<sup>38)</sup> His shared argument was that Catholics' property and leases were insecure under the penal laws so that the improvement of land was discouraged with large arables changed into pastures.<sup>39)</sup> He described a resultant misery of cottagers leading to the Whiteboy disturbance: 'The cottager who has but a groat or at most five pence a day can not make good his covenant, and the landlord thinks himself a loser though he gets his laborer's whole property into his hands... The landlord sucks the blood of the cottager, and the Popish landlord (for reasons needless to mention here) more than any.'<sup>40)</sup> But a recent research shows that he exaggerated the effects of the penal laws on the Irish agriculture. Restrictions of the laws did not affect the rural population below the gentry order. Labourers and small farmers could hardly expect to buy or inherit land, and the law restricting Catholics' leases affected only a minority of the rural population.<sup>41)</sup> The Catholic relief was not actually linked with agrarian reform for making independent yeomanry out of the propertyless. O'Connor and Curry never thought of changing the social structure based on the existing property. They tried to reassure the Protestant landed elites that 'Property is no longer dubious; but ascertained, by the prescription of an whole age, and by all the laws, natural and

human, which have ever conferred a right'.<sup>42)</sup> They renounced Catholics' claim to restitution of land, still more redistribution to the poor.

Solutions of Irish underdevelopment would require examining the Anglo-Irish relation, but O'Connor and Curry hardly referred to English regulations on Irish trade in their economic arguments. They did not inspire Catholics to unite with Protestants in demanding the Irish independence probably because they wanted the English government to check the Irish parliament which had enacted the penal laws. While he referred to patriots with approval when addressing himself to the Irish Protestants, O'Connor was resourceful enough to recommend Catholics as 'counterpoise to national intemperance'<sup>43)</sup>. He even contributed to the *London Chronicle*, pretending to be an English Protestant under the apprehension that Ireland with all the papists converted would presume to break its dependence on England impetuously; Molyneux and Swift were denounced as 'Independents'<sup>44)</sup>.

In O'Connor's vision the two churches could cooperate for economic improvement in the civil constitution. Urban culture as well as economy provided a free sphere beyond religious differences. Dublin was among provincial cities which English urban refinement was permeating with arts and letters encouraged through societies and journalism. O'Connor was acquainted with George Faulkner (1699?-1775), 'a prince of Dublin printers' who was sympathetic with Catholics, publishing O'Connor's pamphlets and histories, asking Dr. Johnson to write pro-Catholic pamphlets at O'Connor's request and suggesting to Burke that Rockingham should become a viceroy of Ireland.<sup>45)</sup> Helping Catholics was a part of his civic commitment to the public good of Ireland. He



was a representative of Dublin Enlightenment: he found it his civic duty to publish the *Dublin Journal* and some works of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Bolingbroke and others. He told O'Connor his vision of tolerant society: 'I wish to make all the world friends and agreeable to each other, and long to have a day with you of Jews, Turkes, Infidels, Hereticks, etc with Christians and people of every denomination, as I love to cure all prejudices, and make the world happy.'<sup>46</sup> This universal sociability forming equal private relations was practiced to some extent in his Dublin circle. O'Connor appreciated his company in which he got acquainted with many people from whom otherwise religious difference would have segregated him.

It is noticeable that he found a solution of confessionalism in such polite society: people of different denominations should communicate with each other to realize their errors. He related Faulkner's circle to Shaftesbury's concept of politeness: 'You see then what merit you have with the public by teaching us, as Lord Shaftesbury finely phrases it, "to rub off our coarse corners by an amicable collision."<sup>47</sup> It is through sociability, specifically through a free conversation, that people learn to judge themselves critically and realize their partiality and prejudice after comparing their own viewpoints with others'. Using the language of sociability, I might say that what O'Connor was doing with his pamphlets may be to create a dialogue between the two denominations which enables them to exchange each other's viewpoints. By writing as a Protestant he was teaching his coreligionists how to detach themselves from Catholic prejudices. By revealing sentiments of enlightened Catholics he was trying to dissolve Protestant prejudices which alone supported the penal laws. A private sphere of sociability in

which Catholics would be treated as equal with Protestants has nothing to do with the public sphere of the establishment of church and state, so the concept of sociability was a nonpolitical way of recovering dignity, and was suitable for the Catholics who pledged allegiance to the civil constitution and renounced political rights.

#### **IV History of Civilization and Rebellion**

O'Connor's and Curry's political discourses on the penal laws involved revising Protestant historiography which was a main cause of prejudices against the Irish and Catholics. Modern history mainly concerning the Irish Rebellion of 1641 was most important when they wanted to reassure Protestants about Catholics' civil allegiance. Many editions of Protestant accounts of the rebellion were published to confirm religious hostility. O'Connor encouraged Curry to complete his history, saying that 'the fair historian (the precursor of peace) is the most useful member of society.'<sup>48)</sup> An impartial history would have modified the hostilities inherited from the previous century and integrated the Irish denominations and further the three kingdoms. I find a similar historical argument in an Irish Presbyterian, James Kirkpatrick, who tried to document Presbyterian loyalty: 'The Dissenters have no political principles but what are founded upon and agreeable to the happy civil constitution and limited monarchy of Great Britain and Ireland;... tho' they are religious dissenters, they are political conformists.'<sup>49)</sup> Though the pleas of loyalty by Catholics and Presbyterians might sound obsequious with hindsight, the accommodation of different religious groups in the British imperial state was among agendas in the eighteenth century. But the integration through

historical revision was not an easy process. Catholics and Presbyterians accused each other of rebelliousness in polemics, emulating in appealing to the established church.<sup>50)</sup> Yet at the same time we might presume that their similar experience of enduring religious discrimination created an implicit sympathy between them as well as hostility to the established church. O'Connor approved Puritans' 'reforming principles', stating that 'An establishment however was made: it required penal sanctions. The Puritan suffered, and the Papist was undone.'<sup>51)</sup>

Protestant polemicists used the word 'popery' to reduce Catholicism to a mere ideology for justifying the clerics' pursuit of political power and wealth. O'Connor and Curry replied by distinguishing the Catholic religion from popery and attributing civil wars to factional passions and interests: 'most of the political evils which have long tormented and still torment Christendom, have been chiefly owing to the passions which prompt, not to the religion which forbids, those derangements.'<sup>52)</sup> They found that the English understanding of the Irish nation as barbarous and later the concept of popery served as ideologies for the English oppression of the Irish. Their indignation to the English injustice was expressed more clearly in their histories than in their conciliatory pamphlets. Curry apparently took a Jacobite historiographical tradition while assuming impartiality by writing as a member of the Church of Ireland in dialogue with a dissenter and using Protestant histories as materials. He described how the English governors oppressed and persecuted the Irish Catholics in spite of their loyalty and provoked them to a desperate rebellion, which 'that government was desirous, and industrious to continue and forment, rather than suppress'.<sup>53)</sup> In the advertisement in Curry's *Historical*

*Memoirs*, O'Connor took a general outlook of Irish history since the English invasion in the twelfth century to show 'the calamities of the nation invariably flowing from public misrules, barbarous manners, private interests, and the rage of parties'. Thus thinking in terms of secular politics rather than of confessionalism, he proceeded to the justification of Irish resistances to such calamities:

Instead of clement governors, purchased at the expence of exorbitant possessions, a set of truculent free-booters, who denied the natives the benefit of the English laws, and of all law... no wonder if a people so devoted, sought redress in frequent insurrections. As far as the cruel state of anarchy established amongst them permitted, they sought and found some redress in resistance. They made efforts to regain the blessings of liberty and government, by the means of force, when they found it vain to seek those blessings by any other! In truth, all the little happiness they enjoyed for near four hundred years, they owed to the sad expedient of insurrection alone!<sup>54</sup>

Here religious factors were remarkably underplayed, which enabled O'Connor to refer to Molyneux's constitutionalism to justify the rebellions.<sup>55</sup> Molyneux's intention was naturally contrary to O'Connor's. In Molyneux's own account in his *The Case of Ireland Stated* (1698) vindicated independence of Protestant Ireland from England was historically based on their conquest of the Gaelic and Catholic Irish. But O'Connor managed to graft this Protestant nationalism on his Catholic cause so that the Catholic rebellion could be counted among legitimate resistances of Irish nationalism.

A common historical understanding between the Irish Protestants

and Catholics was what O'Connor and Curry endeavoured to achieve for removing prejudices. O'Connor was ready to help Protestant historians to write an impartial history of modern Ireland. When he encouraged Thomas Leland,<sup>56)</sup> he stated that 'if we do not exhibit a Hume or a Robertson in our island, it will be his fault.'<sup>57)</sup> This implies that making a philosophical history of Ireland was a national academic challenge for both Protestant and Catholic intellectuals to cooperate to take. But Leland's *History of Ireland* (1773) disappointed O'Connor, who found Leland to be 'a good Protestant' rather than 'a disengaged philosopher'.<sup>58)</sup> Curry was urged by O'Connor to write a book to criticize Leland as 'partial' on three points about the rebellion: first, in the Irish parliament of 1640 the natives were loyal, only trying to restore 'their antient constitutional right of rating their own grants'; second, Catholic clergy did not instigate the natives with their doctrines of 'the universal monarchy of the pope, as well civil as spiritual'; third, the first massacre was committed by Presbyterians.<sup>59)</sup> Then Curry rounded out his historical study with *A Historical and Critical Review* (1775), and repeated his account of the rebellion that the initial local insurrection was caused by a reasonable fear of a deliberate extirpation of the religion or persons, and that the later general defection was instigated by the government: 'Thus, were the Catholic nobility and gentry of Ireland, at last, compelled to unite in a regular body; and to put themselves into that condition of natural self-defence, which has been ever since branded by their enemies, with the appellation of a most odious and unnatural rebellion.'<sup>60)</sup> Though the advertisement of this work says, 'His design is to conciliate, not to irritate',<sup>61)</sup> it is unlikely to satisfy the Protestant public. O'Connor was disappointed with this

history as well, making a judicious comment:

The historical matter of his work is good, but it is a mere compilation without any ornament of style. All along he produces proofs of the civil injuries done the Irish Catholics, and while he justifies the conduct of the latter in various instances, he makes no mention of their follies or imprudence in any. This is not history, which like every true picture should consist of shade and coloring, but it is a mere justification on one side and a disguised invective on the other.<sup>62)</sup>

He himself did not have enough years to complete a modern history of Ireland. After all his project of an impartial history of modern Ireland remained unrealized in a still divided community.

Modern history was more relevant to the Catholic question than ancient history and O'Connor admitted that 'we have now little or no concern' about antiquities.<sup>63)</sup> But I should not think that O'Connor's devotion to the Irish antiquities was mere escapism. I should examine what relevance it had to his political pamphleteering. While, with Gaelic cultural background,<sup>64)</sup> he was an antiquarian keen on preserving Gaelic manuscripts, he was not a fanciful enthusiast but 'a judicious antiquary', in Burke's words,<sup>65)</sup> suggesting a critical edition of ancient manuscripts with English or Latin translations so that they would be available to the wider public for critical and comparative researches.<sup>66)</sup> He was conscious of his practical purpose in the scholarly reconstruction of the Irish ancient past. He revealed his intention: 'It is not enough to show that these elements of knowledge were known here in an early period of time;... If we do not show that the art had been cultivated to the purpose of civilization and abstract knowledge, we

prove but little.<sup>67)</sup> If his history proves the early Irish civilization with highly developed arts and letters, the assumptions of Irish barbarity will be untenable and the justification of the colonization and conversion of the Irish will be lost. O'Connor's ancient history was in the tradition of Irish antiquaries, such as Geoffrey Keating, Peter Walsh, Roderic O'Flaherty, who defended Irish civility against English historians. A representative of this tradition in the early eighteenth century was Hugh MacCurtin (c. 1680–1775) who observed:

But because foreign authors have impos'd upon the world some scandalous aspersions of the poverty, incivility, illiterature, barbarity, &c. of the antient Irish before the coming of the English; I shall here prove out of both domestick and foreign authors, that the antient Irish before the coming of the English were no way inferior to any people or nation in the known world, for religion, literature, civility, riches, hospitality, liberality, warlike spirit, &c.<sup>68)</sup>

I have seen that the civil constitution, commerce and politeness were the principles of the interdenominational unity. O'Connor described how these were indigenous to Ireland to show that the national unity was possible without conversion by the penal laws. Without violent Anglicization Ireland had been a part of the common civilization of Europe. It seems that O'Connor's history was not so much a nationalist history as a history of the Enlightenment and integration. The basic structure of his narrative can be understood by focusing on the three principles. Prevalent Protestant historians, even if Gaelic enthusiasts, tended to deny the ancient Irish constitution, as Walter Harris remarked that 'the Irish before the English conquest had no regular

system of laws or government.<sup>69)</sup> Such a view was refuted by O'Conor who argued that 'our ancient constitution was far from being the ill-digested system', comparing it with the English constitution.<sup>70)</sup> So Kidd is right in regarding the ancient constitution as the core of patriotic *mythistoire*,<sup>71)</sup> but O'Conor did not idealize the constitution as a perfect model. He found the constitution fatally defective in that its elective monarchy caused factional conflicts among the powerful aristocracy and that perpetual domestic disorder incurred a series of invasions and conquests.<sup>72)</sup> In other words, the purpose of his constitutional history was more critical than the celebration of national myth. While making the ancient constitution, O'Conor tried to explain problems of faction with it, giving a lesson of the fatality of too much liberty.

Irish barbarism was a result of the invasions as O'Conor emphasized: 'In truth, our people were in no time savages; what Mr. Hume represents them to have been. Their barbarism, in later ages, was owing to a civil state, the worst that can possibly exist; but the force of manners did in some degree remedy the evil; nor were they greater barbarians, than some of their neighbour-nations.'<sup>73)</sup> It is remarkable that, while politics barbarized, ancient manners civilized in his account. His appreciation of polite manners, commerce and arts in history is a parallel to the apolitical aim of his Catholic movement, that is, of economic and moral improvement. Assuming that the Irish were originally emigrants from the Mediterranean area via Spain, he could put a highly developed civilization in the early stage of their history, and explained that 'the antient natives of this country figured in the commerce and politer arts of their own times.' and that, though lacking



in cities, frequent meetings kept civility among the population.<sup>74)</sup> In a later history of invading powers destroying the civilization ‘a retention of some antient manners, prevented them [the people] from sinking into absolute barbarism, much less a state of savages;’ and specifically bards reminded the people of ‘the spirit of liberty’ and encouraged rebellions, whose objective was to demand the benefits of the English laws for the natives: ‘our music and poetry did in some degree survive government and liberty.’<sup>75)</sup> O’Conor as an antiquarian seems to have identified with these bards to make sure the political significance of his antiquarian studies. He probably wanted to show that the Irish Catholic intellectuals had a national role to play even when deprived of any political institutions and rights by finding in religion and arts ‘a political counter-weight to the evils of a bad civil state’<sup>76)</sup>. O’Conor’s movement was a cultural rather than political nationalism in this point. In his outlook of Irish history the long period of barbarous anarchy divided his eighteenth century and the ancient civilization into which he actually projected his contemporary modern concepts, such as the constitution, commerce, polite manners and arts. It was through remaining culture that he could go back to the ancient civilization. His antiquarian research and modernist political stand were consistent in this historical perspective.<sup>77)</sup>

#### Notes

- 1) Maureen Wall, *Catholic Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, Geography Publications: Dublin, 1989, pp. 94f.
- 2) Jacqueline R. Hill, ‘Popery and Protestantism, Civil and Religious Liberty: The Disputed Lessons of Irish History 1690–1812,’ *Past and Present*, 118 (1988), pp. 105f.
- 3) C. D. A. Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant Kingdom*, St. Martin’s

Press: New York, 1994, pp. 89, 94, 109f.

- 4) I learned much about the significance of sociability in the absolutist state from Daniel Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670–1789*, Princeton U. P., 1994.
- 5) Patrick Kelly, “‘A Light to the Blind’: The Voice of the Dispossessed Elite in the Generation after the Defeat at Limerick,” *Irish Historical Studies*, 24–96 (1985), pp. 445, 451, 455. I am grateful to Dr. Kelly for referring me to this paper of his.
- 6) Richard Archdekin, *A Letter from an English Gentleman, to a Member of Parliament...*, London, 1751, pp. 17, 30, 36.
- 7) Hugh Reilly, *The Impartial History of Ireland...*, London, 1749, pp. iv, 13.
- 8) Patrick Fagan, *Dublin’s Turbulent Priest: Cornelius Nary (1658–1738)*, Royal Irish Academy: Dublin, 1991, pp. 113, 117.
- 9) Cornelius Nary, *The Case of the Roman Catholics of Ireland Humbly Represented to Both Houses of Parliament...*, annexed to Reilly, op. cit., pp. 125–128.
- 10) Ibid., pp. 139–145.
- 11) S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660–1760*, Oxford U. P., 1995, pp. 171f.
- 12) Ibid., p. 294.
- 13) Ibid., p. 290.
- 14) Edward Synge, *The Case of Toleration Consider’d with Respect Both to Religion and Civil Government...*, Dublin, 1726, pp. 7f, 16, 21.
- 15) Ibid., pp. 24–26.
- 16) Ibid., p. 27.
- 17) Edward Lord, *Sermon Preach’d at Christ Church, Dublin...*, Dublin, 1731, p. 17.
- 18) Connolly, op. cit., pp. 258f.
- 19) Charles O’Conor, *The Letters of Charles O’Conor of Belanagare*, eds. Catherine Coogan Ward and Robert E. Ward, 2 vols., University Microfilms International, 1980, No. 220 (to Archbishop John Carpenter, 13 Dec. 1771).
- 20) Ibid., No. 7 (to Denis O’Conor, 6 Jan. 1755).
- 21) [O’Conor], *The Principles of the Roman-Catholics Exhibited in Some*

- Useful Observations on a Pamphlet Intituled, Plain Matters of Fact, Humbly Recommended to the Consideration of the Roman-Catholics of Ireland*, Dublin, 1756, p. 10.
- 22) Leighton, *op. cit.* p. 89.
  - 23) [O'Connor], Introduction in [John Curry], *An Historical and Critical Review of the Civil Wars in Ireland, from the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, to the Settlement under King William, Extracted from Parliamentary Records, State Acts, and Other Authentic Materials*, Dublin, 1775, p. iv.
  - 24) [O'Connor], *The Case of the Roman-Catholics of Ireland, Wherein the Principles and Conduct of That Party Are Fully Explained and Vindicated*, Dublin, 1755, pp. 33, 52f, 67; [O'Connor], *A Vindication of a Pamphlet, Lately Published, Intituled, The Case of the Roman-Catholics of Ireland*, Dublin, 1755, pp. 20-22.
  - 25) O'Connor, *Letters*, No. 27 (to Curry, 29 Aug. 1757).
  - 26) *Ibid.*, No. 15 (to Curry, 20 Aug. 1756).
  - 27) *Ibid.*, No. 18 (to Curry, 22 Sep. 1756); No. 111 (to Curry, 23 Oct. 1762).
  - 28) *An Examination of the Case of the Roman-Catholics of Ireland, Lately Published*, Dublin, 1755, p. 19.
  - 29) [O'Connor], *A Vindication of a Pamphlet, Lately Published, Intituled, The Case of the Roman-Catholics of Ireland*, pp. 20f.
  - 30) O'Connor, *Letters*, No. 395 (to O'Gorman, 29 Oct. 1784).
  - 31) [O'Connor], *The Principles of the Roman Catholics*, pp. 15f, 76.
  - 32) Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 95, 110, 112.
  - 33) [O'Connor], *Seasonable Thoughts Relating to Our Civil and Ecclesiastical Constitution*, Dublin, 1753, pp. 12, 18, 20.
  - 34) O'Connor, *Letters*, No. 381 (to Dr. Charles O'Connor, 27 Dec. 1783).
  - 35) [O'Connor], *The Case of the Roman-Catholics of Ireland*, p. 29. He referred to the Dublin edition (1751) of *The Spirit of Laws*, II, 159 (Book 25 Of laws as relative to the establishment of religion and its external polity, Chapter 9 Of toleration in point of religion). O'Connor seems to have owed to Montesquieu his secular political view of religion and he often referred to his critique of penal laws in general: 'In a word, history sufficiently informs us, that penal laws have never had any other effect but to destroy.' (*The Spirit of Laws*, Book 25,

- Chapter 12 'Of penal laws,' II, 160)
- 36) Samuel Madden, *Reflections and Resolutions Proper for the Gentlemen of Ireland*,..., Dublin, 1738, pp. 69, 78.
  - 37) Leighton, op. cit., p. 116.
  - 38) [O'Connor], *A Vindication of Lord Taaffe's Civil Principles, in a Letter, to the Author of a Pamphlet, Intituled: Lord Taaffe's Observations upon the Affairs of Ireland, Examined and Confuted*, Dublin, 1768, pp. 27, 39–43.
  - 39) [O'Connor and Curry], *Observations on the Popery Laws*, Dublin, 1771, p. 30.
  - 40) O'Connor, *Letters*, No. 145 (to Edmund Burke, 25 Apr. 1765).
  - 41) Connolly, op. cit., pp. 310f.
  - 42) [O'Connor], *Seasonable Thoughts*, p. 46.
  - 43) [O'Connor], *A Vindication of a Pamphlet, Lately Published, Intituled, The Case of the Roman-Catholics of Ireland*, p. 32.
  - 44) *The London Chronicle*, 30 Aug. 1763.
  - 45) O'Connor, *Letters*, No. 24 (to George Faulkner, 10 May 1757); George Faulkner, *Prince of Dublin Printers: The Letters of George Faulkner*, ed. Robert E. Ward, The University Press of Kentucky: Lexington, 1972, p. 47 (to Burke, 20 Jan. 1767).
  - 46) Faulkner, *Letters*, p. 111 (to O'Connor, 4 Feb. 1768).
  - 47) O'Connor, *Letters*, No. 154 (to Faulkner, 28 Oct. 1766).
  - 48) *Ibid.*, No. 242 (to Curry, [1773]).
  - 49) James Kirkpatrick, *An Historical Essay upon the Loyalty of Presbyterians in Great-Britain and Ireland from the Reformation to this Present Year 1713*..., [Belfast], 1713, p. 451.
  - 50) *Ibid.*, p. v; [Curry], op. cit., p. 168.
  - 51) [O'Connor], Introduction in [Curry], op. cit., p. ii.
  - 52) [O'Connor], *The Case of the Roman-Catholics of Ireland*, pp. 11f.
  - 53) [Curry], *A Brief Account from the Most Authentic Protestant Writers of the Cause, Motives, and Mischiefs, of the Irish Rebellion, on the 23d Day of October 1641, Deliver'd in a Dialogue between a Dissenter, and a Member of the Church of Ireland, as by Law Established*, London, 1747, p. 44.
  - 54) [O'Connor], Advertisement in [Curry], *Historical Memoirs of the Irish*

- Rebellion in the Year 1641; Extracted from Parliamentary Journals, State-Acts, and the Most Eminent Protestant Historians,...*, London, 1758, pp. iz, xii.
- 55) *Ibid.*, p. xvii. On Molyneux's use of conquest theory for the Anglo-Irish aristocracy see J. Hill, 'Ireland without Union: Molyneux and His Legacy,' in ed. John Robertson, *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the Union of 1707*, Cambridge U. P., 1995, pp. 277-284.
- 56) O'Connor's trying 'double life' between the scholarly cooperation with Protestant historians and the Catholic political movement is described by Walter D. Love, 'Charles O'Connor of Belanagare and Thomas Leland's "Philosophical" History of Ireland,' *Irish Historical Studies*, 13-49 (1962), pp. 1-25.
- 57) O'Connor, *Letters*, No. 161 (to Faulkner, 13 Jun. 1767).
- 58) *Ibid.*, editors' Introduction, I, xxiii.
- 59) [Curry], *Occasional Remarks on Certain Passages in Dr. Leland's History of Ireland, Relative to the Irish Rebellion in 1641, in a Letter to M-F-, Esq.*, London, 1773, pp. 3, 9, 13, 22.
- 60) [Curry], *A Historical and Critical Review of the Civil Wars in Ireland*, p. 158.
- 61) *Ibid.*, Advertisement.
- 62) O'Connor, *Letters*, No. 268 (to Denis O'Connor, 11 Apr. 1775). Though I do not think it necessary to distinguish their opinions in most points, Curry surely tended to be more akin to Jacobites than O'Connor.
- 63) *Ibid.*, No. 224 (to Curry, 28 Jan. 1772).
- 64) Charles O'Connor, S. J., 'The Early Life of Charles O'Connor (1710-1791) of Belanagare and the Beginning of the Catholic Revival in Ireland in the 18th Century,' National Library of Ireland, 1930, p. 3.
- 65) Edmund Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland, 10 vols., Cambridge U. P., 1958-78, V, 109 (Burke to Colonel Charles Vallancey, 15 Aug. 1783).
- 66) O'Connor, *Letters*, No. 377 (to Chevalier Thomas O'Gorman, 14 Sep. 1783).
- 67) *Ibid.*, No. 218 (to Vallancey, 29 Nov. 1771).
- 68) Hugh MacCurtin, *A Brief Discourse in Vindication of the Antiquity of Ireland: Collected Out of Many Authentick Irish Histories and*

*Chronicles, and Out of Foreign Learned Authors*, Dublin, 1717, p. 286.  
We find how the stereotype of the Irish was formed in a comprehensive study of a variety of literature: J. T. Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-ghael*, Amsterdam, 1986.

- 69) Walter Harris, *Hibernica: Or, Some Antient Pieces Relating to Ireland, Never Hitherto Made Publick*, Dublin, 1747, p. 148.
- 70) O'Connor, *Dissertations on the History of Ireland...*, Dublin, 1766, p. 64.
- 71) Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c. 1830*, Cambridge U. P., 1993, pp. 125f.
- 72) O'Connor, *Dissertations on the History of Ireland*, pp. 54–56, 64f.
- 73) *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
- 74) *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 106.
- 75) *Ibid.*, pp. 138, 90f.
- 76) *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- 77) I got the original concept and materials of this essay when I was a visiting academic of the Department of Modern History, Trinity College, Dublin. I am grateful to the staff of the university, particularly Professor L. M. Cullen, for Irish hospitality and illuminating conversations. I am also grateful to my colleagues of Seijo University, conducting the joint project on modern European economy and culture.