

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Religion and Revolt: The Tithe War in Ireland, 1830-1838**

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite the scarce research on the topic the eight-year Tithe War represents an important moment in the development of Irish-Catholic nationalism and a pivotal change in Irish-British relations. This investigation into the Tithe War uses discourse analysis to reveal how Irish-Catholics exerted an intense degree of agency against the Anglo-Protestant ascendancy during a time in which they possessed seemingly little recourse against the increasingly hegemonic powers of the British state. Understanding the importance of the Tithe War helps to develop a deeper understanding of Irish-British state relations within the larger timeline of Irish-British relations into the twentieth century. The Tithe War also demonstrates the role of religious identity in shaping collective action and nationalism. This paper highlights how the violence of war grabbed both media and government attention and led to the gradual disestablishment of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Church in 1869. This short article provides insight into the actions of everyday Irish-Catholics and how their actions led to critical changes in Irish-British relations. It also highlights how the British media and British officials understood, disregarded, and navigated the increasingly hard-to-ignore “Irish problem.”

*Keywords:* Catholic-Protestant, Religious Wars, Tithe War, British-Irish Relations

**INTRODUCTION**

The Tithe War was a series of violent skirmishes and confrontations in Ireland that represented a crucial moment in the development of Irish Catholic resistance against the growing Anglo-Protestant ascendancy in Ireland between 1830 and 1838. Irish Catholics acted throughout the Tithe War in defiance of the Protestant Church's imposition of tithe collection, which represented an extension of British political and religious authority over Irish Catholic sovereignty (Baker 2009; Burg 2003). While frustrations had increased over the previous several decades, this eight-year period represented a turning point for Irish Catholic collective resistance and civil disobedience. Rather than submitting to conversion or a subordinate place in society, Irish Catholics

rallied around their religious and ethnic identity to challenge the expanding Anglo-Protestant hegemony through, what Irish Catholics believed to be, necessarily violent means to exert and defend nationhood, religious identity, and agency.

The Tithe War represents an important reaction to the political, economic, and religious tensions that existed between Ireland and Britain in the early 1800s (Montgomery 1988). The war also provides a glimpse into Irish Catholic nationalism and anti-British sentiments during the mid-nineteenth century. After a brief exploration as to why the Tithe War broke out in 1830, this paper analyzes the British government's view of the War as expressed through print media. My discursive analysis of British and Irish newspapers reveal that British government repeatedly ignored

and put off the Tithe War issue between 1830 and 1834, placing blame on the Irish Catholic clergy while excusing the parishioners' behaviour (Foucault 1975, 1976; Wijssen 2010). However, between 1835 and 1838, the Irish Catholics' continued frustration with the British government forced Britain into passing legislative changes as it was clear to the British government that they could no longer blame the War on the Catholic clergy.

This paper utilizes nineteenth and twentieth century papers accessed through online newspaper archives and supplemented with secondary sources focusing on the surrounding history of the event. The discursive analysis used reveals the ways media constructed ideas of citizenship in empire and how power manifested and was challenged. As demonstrated by anthropologists, the use of discourse analysis to analyze newspaper texts is critical in discovering the cultural creation and experience of individuals within a particular time and place (Bird 2009). Such an analysis, and focus on religious identity, also highlights the power individual bodies hold in disrupting systems of official power (Jordan 2014). This work reflects the sentiment put forth by Max Weber that such research can be used to ascertain the connection between religion, identity, and political action (Lambek 2001). British and Irish newspapers reveal how Irish Catholics, through their collective show of agency in the eight-year-long Tithe War, chipped away at the entrenched Anglo-Protestant ascendancy in Ireland and enjoyed a level of tangible change that benefitted Irish Catholics.

### **RISING TENSIONS, 1801-1829**

While Irish-British and Protestant-Catholic tensions date back centuries, this analysis begins with the Act of Union that passed at the turn of the century in 1801 (Dunn 1979; Southcombe and Taspell 2010; Wolffe 1994, 2013, 2014; Smyth 1992, 2001; Brown

2001). The Act of Union (1801) fused together the parliaments of Ireland and Britain and was agreed upon by both parliaments, although the Irish parliament was dominated by Anglo-Irish Protestants and thus did not represent Irish Catholics' desires (Montgomery, 1988). The minority Protestant ruling class hoped to better control Irish Catholics after the 1798 rebellion and the agreement clearly resulted from increasing fears of Catholic demands for emancipation (Gibney 2018, 327). In becoming one kingdom and abolishing the Irish parliament, the Act also fused together the Protestant churches of Ireland and England (Montgomery 1988, 15). By incorporating Ireland's Protestant Church into England's, Britain gained more political and social control over Ireland. The Act of Union also limited Irish political power by allowing the British parliamentary system to absorb the Irish political structure (Montgomery 1988, 5). Most importantly for Catholics, particularly Irish Catholics, British Prime Minister William Pitt also promised in the Act of Union to provide Ireland with Catholic Emancipation, which was intended to assure Irish Catholics full participation in politics, professions, and the ability to fully and publicly participate in their religion (Jenkins 1988, 364). However, King George III reneged on Pitt's promise of Emancipation, resulting in the disappointment of many Irish Catholics, but also a great deal of frustration with this infringement on nationhood. The failed commitment to Emancipation meant that the Anglo-Irish Protestant minority within Ireland increasingly dictated Irish Catholics' way of life (Montgomery 1988, 18). Irish Catholics represented most of the population in Ireland and felt that the actions of the Anglo-Irish Protestant churches, in tandem with the British government, represented an overreach of British cultural and political control.

After three decades of waiting, Catholic Emancipation finally passed in 1829 (Jenkins 1988). It allowed Irish Catholics to become

members of parliament as well as hold public offices (Jenkins 1988, 277). However, the bill did not quash Irish nationalism and the “Irish question” remained a worrying issue for Anglo-Protestants (McCaffrey 1968). Many British Protestants felt that no number of concessions would appease the Irish Catholics, and that Emancipation was simply a pretence for destabilizing the Protestant Church altogether (Jenkins 1988, 277). For Irish Catholics, the incomplete and long delayed Catholic Emancipation only further frustrated the population. The protracted time it took to enact Emancipation allowed Protestant-Catholic distrust and conspiracies to proliferate through gossip, newspapers, and governmental rhetoric (Jenkins 1988, 276).

The nearly three-decade-long process of fighting for Emancipation also produced an increasingly politically active Irish Catholic population (Montgomery 1988). Examples of Irish Catholics politicization as a result of Emancipation’s failure belong to four major areas. First, the continued collection of tithes by the Protestant Church represented a stark reminder to many Irish Catholics of the control that the Anglo-Irish minority exerted over them. The collection of tithes began in the sixteenth century but became a greater political tool in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century which caused heightened unrest among Irish Catholics (Bric 1986, 271). Second, Emancipation did not change the judicial system in Ireland and Justices of the Peace remained largely clergy in the Protestant Church of Ireland (Montgomery 1988, 86). Therefore, Irish Catholics felt limited in the possible and effective systemic change that could occur. Third, in contrast to the University of Dublin which served as a seminary for the Protestant Church of Ireland, Irish Catholics in Ireland had no national university of the same nature (Montgomery 1988, 87). The minority Protestants of Ireland held a disproportionate amount of social and cultural capital in Ireland. Finally, Catholic

Emancipation failed to address the issue of land distribution in Ireland (Montgomery 1988). The Church of Ireland possessed nearly 700,000 acres of land, which produced a revenue of about one million sterling pounds each year or around forty-six million pounds in contemporary currency (Montgomery 1988, 86). With many rural Irish Catholics exposed to bouts of famine and poor living conditions, the large amount of revenue produced by the Protestant church represented a major failure in Catholic Emancipation (Gibney 2018, 318). The Catholic Emancipation that Irish Catholics hoped for did not come to fruition in 1829 and tensions continued to proliferate between Anglo-Protestant Britons and Irish Catholics.

Daniel O’Connell, an Irish Catholic seated in the United Kingdom Parliament, echoed these limitations to his largely Irish-Catholic audience (Montgomery 1988, 2). Although he had advocated strongly for Catholic Emancipation, the legislative reality of Emancipation greatly frustrated O’Connell. Primarily, he understood that the Act of Union constrained the success of Catholic Emancipation (Montgomery 1988, 2). He believed that equality and an end to Anglo-Protestant ascendancy could only be achieved by ending the Act of Union, and, in its place, creating an independent Irish parliament. Because Catholic Emancipation did not address the Anglo-Protestant hegemony’s legal, social, and cultural mistreatments, it failed to provide Irish Catholics with a sense of sovereignty and religious freedoms. O’Connell and his ‘radical’ beliefs represented a critical voice for Irish Catholics in the British government.

Contributing to their unhappiness was the increased religious fervour on both sides of the Catholic-Protestant divide which marked the religious culture of the 1820s (Montgomery 1988). Religious zeal contributed to growing tensions prior to the outbreak of the Tithe War. A Protestant bible crusade that aimed to convert Catholics

through missionary activities resulted in Protestants utilizing soup kitchens and evangelism to carry on the Protestant Reformation in an attempt to convert Irish Catholics (Montgomery 1988, 4). This attempt to convert using soup kitchens preyed upon rural Irish Catholics affected by famines and poverty, thereby exploiting the power dynamic between the two religious groups. It also reinforced the uneven economic distribution between the minority Protestants in Ireland and the much larger number of Catholics.

While Protestants went on bible crusades and conversion missions, the Catholic clergy in Ireland grew more outspoken against the perceived injustices they witnessed against their faith and their parishioners (Montgomery 1988, 4). These clergy members felt compelled by a sense of Irish nationalism, marked by the two-fold idea of Catholicism and anti-Britishness (Montgomery 1988, 4). The formation of a nationalistic Irish Catholic clergy, when combined with a more politically aware and frustrated Irish Catholic population who witnessed increasing Protestant evangelism created ideal conditions for resistance to form.

### THE EARLY YEARS, 1830-1834

Two key individuals who frequently appeared in newspaper discussions during the Tithe War's early years and shared the same last name: Dr. James Doyle and Reverend Martin Doyle (*Courier* 1831, 2).<sup>1</sup> Both individuals supported the resistance of Irish Catholics and called out the repressive aspects of the Anglo-Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. Both individuals represented key figures that began and supported parishioners' efforts the War. For the British government and media the two men also represented easy scapegoats on which to blame the War on.

Reverend Martin Doyle was an Irish Catholic priest in the town of Graiguenamanagh in the county of Kilkenny (Montgomery 1988). His refusal to pay his tithe in 1830 began the Tithe War. This small challenge towards Anglo-Protestant authority marked the first act of resistance and set the precedent for other Irish Catholics who wished to take a stand against Protestant imposition. After hearing about Reverend Doyle's defiance, his parishioners similarly refused to pay their tithe. Graiguenamanagh's population contained 4479 Catholics and only 63 Protestants (Montgomery 1988, 100). This population difference demonstrates the unequal dynamic that existed between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland. However, the population difference also meant that Catholics had the upper hand if they chose to unite against the Protestant minority. Reverend Doyle encouraged his parishioners to work together and use non-violent resistance. When authorities came to seize livestock, which was a common punishment for tithe refusal as the livestock could be auctioned off to cover the payment of tithe, the priest's parishioners worked together to prevent the seizure of animals. This event provided the model for future resistant acts. The six hundred soldiers and police sent to seize livestock also highlights the control that the Anglo-Irish Protestant groups exercised over Irish Catholics through the law. The systems of justice within Ireland heavily favoured Protestants. However, the ability for Irish Catholics to resist tithe collection by working together, either preventing the seizure of livestock or refusing to bid on livestock auctions, demonstrated unity within the anti-tithe movement.

Similar acts of resistance occurred throughout Kilkenny County (Montgomery

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<sup>1</sup> Newspapers often vaguely referenced one or both of the men. The two men were also distantly related which added to the confusion of writers at the time and current researchers reading these newspapers. For this paper, I differentiate the two Doyle's based on the title, Dr. or Reverend, and make a note when newspapers do not make who they are referencing clear. In these cases, I make assumptions based on the context and year.

1988). Unlike the initial incident in Graiguenamanagh, many others descended into violence. In Newtownbarry, police fired upon and killed twelve farmers and wounded others (Montgomery 1988, 101). Other times peasants and police died in skirmishes (Montgomery 1988, 102-3). A similar, though not preplanned event in Carrickshock resulted in disorganization and confusion (Owens 2004, 36). Within minutes of thirty-eight constables arriving to collect dues, thirteen of those constables lay dead from townspeople throwing rocks, using pitchforks, and other items with the exemption of firearms (Owens 2004, 37). The Carrickshock episode resonated in local history with various poems and ballads composed around the incident (Owens 2004, 39). Other memorial pieces created during and after the initial Carrickshock incident included paintings, banners, and monuments (Owens 2004, 58). One ballad published in an Irish newspaper specified: “Each stalwart hand grasped its weapon: The hurley, the pitchfork, the scythe, For by the blue heaven above them. Those men will no longer pay tithes” (*Munster Express* 1946, 3). Published over a century after the incident, this ballad demonstrates the importance of the event for Irish-Catholic identity. Such artistic expressions of the event rallied resisters and helped the community to make sense of the sporadic and violent events, as well as commemorating the united effort of standing up against the Anglo-Protestant hegemony (*Munster Express* 1946, 3). It also demonstrates an important connection between “connection between religion, language, and poetics” (Lambek 2001, 4). The importance of such works to the Irish Catholics collective ethno-religious identity is evident as they continued to be published well after the period, as noted above. The violence experienced at Carrickshock and the victims being predominantly officers rather than townspeople exemplifies the unified resistance led by rural parishioners characteristic of this war.

The growing active resistance to tithes was met by a similarly increasing determination on the part of tithe owners to collect their dues, furthering the violence (Montgomery 1988, 110). Another uprising occurred in the town of Drumcolloher in Limerick County. The *True Sun* reported on the incident using an excerpt from the *Dublin Freeman’s Journal*. The Dublin-based author began, “Whilst...his Majesty’s ministers are amusing the empire with the post-Union prosperity of Ireland, his majesty’s troops and police are shooting the people...in Drumcolloher” (*True Sun* 1834, 2). The concluding lines stated, “are tithes to be abolished or is the blood of the people to continue to flow for resistance to an impost at variances with their consciousness...justice...and from whose burthen ministers promised relief?” (*True Sun* 1834, 2). Although the period is labelled as “Tithe Wars,” the skirmishes were far from formal battles, still brutality remained common. The violence directed towards constables and officers led many of them becoming victims of the Tithe War rather than parishioners becoming victims to police force. It was this use of fierce resistance that brought more attention to the issue. The violent acts that resulted in dozens of deaths forced the British media and government to pay some mind to the war. However, both British institutions refused to take the war seriously and address the systemic causes of the brutal resistance. Instead, media and lawmakers used paternalistic rhetoric and pushed responsibility onto Irish Catholics and their ‘intrinsic inferiority’ (*True Sun* 1834, 2).

The events of Wallstown in 1832 provides yet another example of the Tithe War’s violence that served to stir parliamentary officials’ attention (*London Bell New Weekly Messenger* 1832, 2). The town of Wallstown contained “upwards of three thousand Catholics and only *one* Protestant” (*London Bell New Weekly Messenger* 1832, 2).

These numbers serve to highlight the uneven distribution between Catholics and Protestants. Despite such unequal numbers the military entered the town to help defend the parson's legal right to collect tithes. Indeed, "that this legal right of the parson to fleece the many for the sake of the one, was triumphantly vindicated at an expense of more than four persons slaughtered outright..." (*London Bell New Weekly Messenger* 1832, 2). Daniel O'Connell used the violent incident as the proof needed to push for reform. Although O'Connell's efforts failed to bring about immediate success it points towards the impact these affairs began to have in the minds of British officials.

The Irish Catholic clergy played an instrumental role in the Tithe War and the fight for Catholic rights in general during this period (Montgomery 1988). The clergy's involvement appears to build from their connection with O'Connell, who founded the Catholic Association in the 1820s, a period of increased religious sentiment. Most Catholic clergy members joined the association and supported O'Connell's fight for Emancipation (Montgomery 1988, 155). The association provided Catholic clergy with a sense of community and collective identity based on Catholicism and anti-British passion. Many clergy members who supported Emancipation felt disappointed because it failed to abolish tithes. Anglo-Protestants still exercised control over them through the tithe system (Montgomery 1988, 158). The Catholic Association and the collective identity it helped forge in the 1820s created a collective consciousness that primed clergy members for widespread participation in the Tithe Wars.

Doctor James Doyle contributed the most outstanding example of motivation for parishioners (*London World* 1831, 2). Dr. Doyle published a letter to the *Freeman's Journal* in 1831 titled "Letters recommending the Introduction of Provision for the Poor" (*London World* 1831, 2). The title indicated the

interaction between religion and poverty between Ireland and Britain. In the letter to the newspaper, Dr. Doyle wrote a scathing critique of the Protestant Church's clergy and tithe owners. He strongly condemned the tithe collection, stating that the tithe's original purpose was to care for the poor but that the Protestant Church did no such thing and thus collected money in bad faith (Montgomery 1988, 164). A large portion of his argument rested on the mistreatment of the poor, which emphasizes how poverty afflicted Irish Catholics. While Britain enacted a series of laws to help those who were destitute, such laws were not expanded to Ireland when the Act of Union came into law in 1801 (Crossman 2013, 3). In July 1831, a debate in the House of Lords was published in a *Courier* newspaper (*Courier* 1831, 2). Lord Farnham, an Irish representative, read aloud part of Dr. Doyle's letter in the House. According to the newspaper, Lord Farnham expressed indignation towards Dr. Doyle's ability to disseminate "such sentiments through Ireland-sentiments which were calculated to effect so much mischief," and stated, "that Dr. Doyle was morally responsible for the very blood which had been shed in the late unfortunate affair in Newtownbarry" (*Courier* 1831, 2). The papers demonstrated that the Lords in the parliamentary system pointed their fingers squarely at Dr. Doyle for the tithe resistance rather than addressing the parishioners themselves or the systemic issues that fostered the acts of resistance in the first place.

More references to Dr. Doyle's writings illustrated that his publications were a contentious topic for the House of Lords. An 1832 edition of the *Albion and the Star* covered an interview from the Lords' Tithe Committee which investigated the ongoing matter in Ireland. The Reverend Samuel Thomas Roberts, an Anglo-Protestant, answered the committee's questions. Concerning the uprisings, the question posed was, "Are you of the opinion, that if this general conspiracy....

had not been resorted to by certain persons...that the tithes would have been paid as usual without reluctance?" (*Albion and the Star* 1832, 3). The "persons unconnected" referred to Dr. Doyle, who became the priest in Graigue shortly before the Tithe War began. Reverend Roberts answered a simple, "Yes" (*Albion and the Star* 1832, 3). The second last question went as follows, "Before these disturbances, did the clergy live on good terms with their Roman Catholic parishioners?" (*Albion and the Star* 1832, 3). Reverend Roberts replied,

Remarkably. I have been in my parish since the rebellion of 1798, and I never was afraid to into [sic] my parish to meet my parishioners about any business. I never heard any expression from the people showing a disinclination to pay tithes to the Protestant minister till lately – till very lately. (*Albion and the Star* 1832, 3).

For English Lords, Dr. Doyle's inflammatory statements clearly connected directly to the parishioner's rebellious actions.

Newspaper segments reveal that the Tithe War was well-known to English readers. A British newspaper printed a section labelled "TITHES IN IRELAND," indicating that the War captured enough public intrigue and concern to have its own section (*Albion and the Star* 1832, 3). The newspaper's transcript contained only a short preface explaining the Reverend referenced in the Graigue and Kilkenny areas, revealing that the tithe issue was known well enough by the readership to not need explicit explanations of the situation. Both the questions and answers demonstrate a paternal affection expressed by English parliament towards the parishioners, who a member of parliament described as possessing an innocence that the Catholic clergy,

particularly Dr. Doyle, corrupted. Such an interview shows that the government did not blame active resisters on the ground but rather the Catholic clergy that incited and encouraged the behaviour. However, this British view of the Irish Catholic parishioners dislocated agency from the Irish Catholic protestors and reinforced the British view that the parishioners were easily influenced. This interpretation acted to dehumanize Irish Catholics as the British constructed the "Irish Catholic citizen" as weak, easily manipulated, and passive.

The British government could not afford to continue to ignore the Tithe War as violence increased and deaths mounted (*Albion and the Star* 1834, 2). Members in the House of Lords brought potential solutions, prompted mainly by petitions presented by various Lords on behalf of their constituents. These petitions formed the basis for turning acts of resistance into legal changes. However, they were not unique to the Tithe War. Rather, petitions were consistently used in this period to address issues that sprang up such as drunkenness or a want for stricter observance of the Sabbath (*Albion and the Star* 1834, 2). The *Albion and the Star* in May 1834 covered the House's discussion around a proposed Tithe Bill. One line indicated, "The Hon. Member presented three other Petitions, one from a place in Ireland against tithes, another from Rochester against malt duties, and the third from Kingston...in favor of the Labourers' Union Bill" (*Albion and the Star* 1834, 2). The same newspaper also mentioned the debate surrounding the Tithe Bill being delayed and subsequently resumed (*Albion and the Star* 1834). The delay in tithe-related debates may indicate that the issue in Ireland, although an inconvenience to the Church of Ireland and England, was not pressing compared to other petitions, particularly those presented from English counties. The newspapers reflect how Irish issues were secondary to British issues (Gibney 2018, 32). The de-emphasis on Irish

issues served to reinforce the hierarchy between Ireland and Britain. Nonetheless, petitions and resistance on the ground were vital for instituting discussion and change even when the British tried to relegate their priority.

As an Irish-Catholic representative, Daniel O'Connell heavily advocated for Irish Catholics and pressed the issue of the Tithe War in hopes of gaining attention and finding a solution that addressed the root causes of the Irish-British issue (*Albion and the Star* 1834). He was a strong supporter for abolishing the tithe system altogether. O'Connell touched upon the English disinterest in the topic when he told the English members, "if they wished discontent in Ireland to cease they must at least show a disposition to endeavour to learn the state of Ireland" (*Albion and the Star* 1834, 2). He went on and condemned "miserable attendance" of English members on "a question to vitally interesting to Ireland as that of tithes" (*Albion and the Star* 1834, 2). O'Connell also pushed back against the notion that the Tithe War was only the result of Catholic clergy's agitation. Instead, he claimed that it was the result of "hatred of tithes", which began in "1760 when the first war broke out, and in 1763 when the first measure for its repression was passed by Parliament" (*Albion and the Star* 1834, 2). O'Connell's references harken back to the Irish Patriot Party's resistance in the Irish House of Representatives which began in 1760 and Britain's legislative attempts to minimize their efforts (Gibney 2018, 32). It is clear that the English used repressive measures to maintain control over Ireland rather than finding solutions that addressed the underlying ethnic, religious, and cultural disputes. In referencing this history of England possessing and repressing Ireland, O'Connell highlighted Irish Catholics' hatred of the British and the desire for change through any means.

The previously mentioned uprising in 1834 in the town of Drumcollogher in Limerick County stirred a particularly unique

response that reflected O'Connell's sentiments (*True Sun* 1834, 2). Unlike articles written by English writers in England, an article written by an Irish author in Dublin exuded more sympathy towards the devastation and growing loss of life that the Tithe War incurred (*True Sun* 1834, 2). The Dublin author expressed displeasure over the growing number of disturbances that grew from the British government's failure to address underlying causes. The author reminds readers that, "disappointed hope often turns into the deepest despair and hence the resistance of the parishioners." (*True Sun* 1834, 2). This commentary mirrors O'Connell's emotional response towards the British indifference in the House of Lords. Irish-based writers expressed sympathy towards Irish Catholic parishioners and their resistance while criticizing the lacklustre response from the British government. These writers constructed citizens who were sympathetic, strong, and resisting the wrongs of the British government.

The passing of the Church Temporalities Bill in 1834 marked a turning point in the Tithe War (Montgomery 1988). This bill represented the British government's first serious attempt to find a solution during the conflict. The bill addressed issues such as abolishing the cess tax, which was a separate tax from the tithe but also disliked by Irish Catholics (Montgomery 1988, 142). The bill also reduced the number of Protestant dioceses (Montgomery 1988, 142). As O'Connell aptly pointed out during a discussion about the bill, "To produce the pacification of Ireland they must altogether end ecclesiastical tithes in Ireland" (*Albion and the Star* 1834, 2). Despite O'Connell supporting this bill he recognized that it was far from comprehensive and that many of the issues Irish Catholics had raised over the years remained unaddressed. With tithe resistances continuing in dozens of counties it was unlikely that a bill which failed to even address tithes would end the War.



### THE LATE YEARS, 1835-1838

Despite the Church Temporalities Bill Irish Catholics continued their resistance to tithe collection. They expressed their feelings towards the bill and indicated to Britain that it remained inadequate. As one newspaper pointed out in 1836, "...but Ireland is not pacified, and the tithe-war rages as before" (*London Chronicle* 1836, 2). The Tithe War's final years involved Irish Catholics continued refusal of tithe collections and only paying if they were compelled to through severe legal recourse. In Munster every county withheld half the tithe payments (Montgomery 1988, 143). In many Ulster counties, more than half of the payments were withheld (Montgomery 1988, 143). At this point, the British government became increasingly hesitant to provide support to those trying to collect tithes or act as tithe collectors themselves due to the many deaths of law enforcement that the Tithe War caused (Montgomery 1988, 145). The Tithe War's sustained agitation, intimidation, and demonstration illustrated to the British government that only sufficient change would bring an end to the War in Ireland.

Various newspapers signified the Tithe War's successful protest in various Irish counties. One account of a man in Tipperary described how Walter Brit, a "respectable farmer," saw his eighty-seven sheep seized for public auction to cover his unpaid tithes (*True Sun* 1837, 2). "Having learned of the seizure and threatened sale," the neighbouring counties gathered in preparation for the bid, or lack thereof (*True Sun* 1837, 2). The sale was ultimately a failure with the "sub sheriff" declaring the sheep "unsaleable" because "Previous to that hour the sheep had been driven in, on the back of each the word 'tithes' having been largely and legibly branded" (*True Sun* 1837, 2). When the gathered crowd saw Brit return home with his sheep, they "set up a tremendous shout of triumph," for what the writer of the newspaper described as

"another blow to tithes" (*True Sun* 1837, 2). This event is one example of the many unique methods of resistance employed by tithe resisters and the success they enjoyed.

The steadfast efforts of Irish Catholics who participated in the Tithe War are shown in another 1837 newspaper article (*True Sun* 1837, 1). The paper described Thomas Brooke, a Protestant reverend, who obtained warrants to collect tithes from "several Catholic farmers...in the hope of coercing them to settlement" (*True Sun* 1837, 1). However, the only result was that the Catholic farmers "remain shut up in their houses, afraid to move out to fair or market or any place their business calls them" (*True Sun* 1837, 1). This article showed that tithe protestors often engaged in demonstrations that put themselves and their family in uncomfortable positions while remaining determined to refuse further tithe payments, even when collections came around. Such efforts represent a clear sense of ethno-religious identity and nationalism.

While many newspapers reported on parishioners' successful resistance to tithe collection there were also many reports of less successful resistance (*True Sun* 1836, 2). Under the heading "ANOTHER TITHE PERSECUTION," a *True Sun* paper detailed the various successful collection of tithes by Protestant ministers. One example, written into the newspaper by a Protestant Reverend named Mr. Farelly, poignantly demonstrated a lack of sympathy towards the Irish Catholic tithe-resisters. Farelly stated,

Execution the other day has come down against him the entire of his cattle has been sold...I tender the Association my solemn assurance that this martyred individual, together with his aged mother and helpless family, reduced from independence and comfort of the farmer, to all abjection and

privations of the merest pauper.  
(*True Sun* 1836, 2).

Farely indicated that, after his failed resistance, the Irish Catholic parishioner faced poverty and the removal of cattle to pay for the tithe. Farely also revealed that there was some success because these individuals became “martyred” to their fellow Catholic parishioners. Thus, a failed resistance reinforced Irish Catholics’ disdain for the Protestant institution and strengthened the need for Irish Catholic political unity.

Another example of successful tithe collection comes from the point of view of an Irish Catholic priest, Reverend Robert Walsh (*True Sun* 1836, 2). This perspective allows for a more sympathetic and humane view of Irish Catholics. Walsh wrote a letter to the *True Sun* on the impact of tithe collections on his church. He stated that his church struggled to collect donations for “chapel repairs and schools” (*True Sun* 1836, 2). He also wrote, “Their families are ruined, and their own health nearly destroyed from their absence from their homes. My heart heaves with indignation for their cruel treatment and compassion for their sufferings” (*True Sun* 1836, 2). Walsh’s letter denotes the suffering of both the church and parishioners at the hands of Protestant tithe collection.

As acts of resistance led to mounting pressure on the British parliament to pass an adequate piece of legislation, many British parliamentarians remained steadfast in defending the Church of England in Ireland during debates. Newspapers recounted the debates around a proposed Irish Church Bill. One such paper revealed an argument between Mr. Young, a Protestant, and Mr. W.S. O’Brien, an Irish Catholic nationalist. The report related to its readers that, “Mr. Young informed the hon. gent. who had just sat down, [Mr. O’Brien] that he was quite wrong with regard to the clergy of the Established Church; they had already made extensive sacrifices to

conciliate the people of Ireland...” later adding that he “did not believe that a hundredth part of the people of Ireland were so savagely hostile to the Established Church as presented; the peasantry, grateful for the smallest favours received, had not forgotten the charities of the Protestant clergy” (*London St. James Chronicle and General Evening Post* 1836, 1). The apparent acts of charity that Mr. Young claims were directly contradicted by Irish Catholics’ claims of poverty and distress (*The Morning Post* 1835, 3). The disagreement between Mr. O’Brien and Mr. Young encapsulated the competing views between Anglo-Protestants and Irish Catholics. The dedication to the Anglo-Protestant establishment by British members of parliament only served to prolong the Tithe War and aggravate Irish Catholics. The Protestant tithe owners who acted on their legal right to collect tithes only provoked new incidents and renewed resistance within communities. Parishioners’ continued resistance after the Church Temporalities Bill gave the British government reason to continue to discuss the issue and move forward with further legislation.

In 1838, the British government passed the Commutation Bill, also known as the Irish Tithe Act (*Courier* 1838, 4). The Bill converted the tithe payment into a fixed rent charge and reduced it by three-quarters (Bric 1986, 282). In theory, this bill hoped to transfer the burden of payments to the landowners, usually Protestants (Montgomery 1988, 151). In reality, the landowners simply raised the rents on Irish Catholic peasants and farmers (Montgomery 1988, 151). The bill ended the war but it did not end the Irish Catholic aversion to the Anglo-Protestant ascendancy and it did not erase the Irish Catholic nationalism that the War cultivated. One newspaper covered a parishioners’ meeting in Achill, where they discussed possible resolutions surrounding the tithe issue. They stated,

That we view tithes, in whatever name or shape they may be exacted, as an accrued and unjust impost; and that we feel, in common with our fellow countrymen generally, tithes to be a badge of slavery, alike insulting to the feelings and pride of the Roman Catholics, and disgracefully sustained for the purpose of perpetuating the domination of an intolerance and bigoted faction over the vast majority of her Majesty's loyal subjects in these realms. That we here proclaim our undying and eternal hatred of that blood-stained and odious impost, and our determination to see every legal and constitutional means, for the total and unqualified extinction of the name; and that we shall never be contented, till the voluntary principle be adopted, by which the people will have to pay only the clergy of that persuasion whoes [sic] spiritual services they respectively enjoy. (*London Standard* 1838, 2).

This passage took up nearly an entire column on the page. The orator explained that although the 1838 Act quieted tithes discourse there remained displeasure in what the new rent charge symbolized. The passage above likened such payments to slavery. Armed with the nearly two decades of political activism and demonstration Irish Catholics continued their refusal to remain content with supporting the Protestant established church. With tithes officially abolished Irish Catholics continued to call for legislative changes to repeal the Act of Union (1801) and the disestablish the Protestant Church of England and Ireland.

Irish Catholics viewed the Protestant Church in Ireland as a representation of British control (James 1979, 433). In 1869, the British government passed legislation disestablishing the Protestant Church in Northern Ireland (Montgomery 1988, 155). The legislation removed the Church's connection to the monarch, sold some of its property, and ceased the collection of tithes (Montgomery 1988, 156). It helped to ease relations with Irish Catholics and aided in uniting British Prime Minister William Gladstone's Liberal Party (Fair 1975, 380). The Tithe War resulted in legislation that helped achieve this disestablishment and as such it was the Tithe War that helped chip away at the Protestant Church's control in Ireland. The Tithe War was an important point in Catholic-Protestant relations between Ireland and Britain. These critical eight years exemplify the Irish Catholics' show of agency and tenacity against a powerful Anglo-Protestant ascendancy.

## CONCLUSION

As anthropologists Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan (2006) suggests, anthropologists studying Ireland should consider "the moral power of the Catholic Church hierarchy; formal, state-sanctioned legal power; and illegal, illicit and subversive forms of power in the hands of those who resist, invert and transform official forms of power for their own ends." (67). This paper has attempted to contribute to that understanding by focusing on how Irish Catholics adapted and shaped their ethno-religious identity and challenged hegemonic power structures. Additionally, tracing the particulars of this religious resistance highlights how the invention and "re-invention of Irish depends to a great extent on...notions of local and national identity" (Wilson and Donnan 2006, 1). As a result, this analysis demonstrated how "individuals and communities find ways to make the immaterial of religious life visible, tangible, visceral, and material. Beliefs are

communicated, morals lived out, emotions expressed, and spirits manifest. The internal is externalized” (Bielo 2015, 78).

Newspapers from the Tithe War reveal the long, drawn-out debate about Irish Catholic “question” and the topic of tithes. However, the issue of tithes represented a much larger problem of prolonged mistreatment and marginalization of the Irish Catholics by an Anglo-Protestant hegemony. As Irish Catholic advocate Daniel O’Connell rightly pointed out, these issues stretched back many years and persisted due to the lack of adequate change on the part of the British government. The English members of the House of Lords remained content to put the cause of the Tithe War on Catholic Clergy, who they considered to be corrupting local parishioners. The profound discontent that existed among the people would not be easily fixed and thus went largely unaddressed in the House of Lords. The Tithe War’s unique violence and longevity prompted critical changes in legislation. This represented a striking manifestation of Irish Catholic agency and strength as they forced the British government to view them as more than a rogue state requiring civilization through Anglo-Protestant values. Irish Catholics utilized their advantage in numbers and their shared religious identity to elicit change from the British government. The protests of Irish Catholics forced the British government to address some of the issues plaguing Catholics in Ireland, thereby chipping away at the Anglo-Protestant ascendancy. The Tithe War represented an important step towards freedom from British-Protestant control and demonstrated how Irish Catholics expressed sovereignty through their religious identity in the face of Anglo-Protestant control.

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