

# *The Catholic Emancipation in the 1920s in Ireland*

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**Abstract:** During the period 1825-1829, the New Catholic Association was a major event in the Catholic Emancipation of Ireland. Unlike other Irish Catholic organizations in the past, the New Catholic Association was an organization led by Catholic farmers under the leadership of priests. They formed a powerful force through extensive social mobilization and finally forced the British Parliament to pass the Catholic Relief Bill, which took a big step forward in the liberation of Irish Catholics. Among them, the means by which Catholics mobilized Catholic farmers are worth studying. The article will analyze the situation of the classes before The Catholic Emancipation and try to explain why the clergy and farmers ultimately went towards cooperation.

**Keywords:** ireland, catholicism, catholic emancipation, nationalism, gaelic

## 1. Introduction

In 1801, the British formally incorporated the island of Ireland into the territory of the Kingdom of Great Britain, although the then British Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger claimed that the merger of the two sides could not only strengthen the ties between the two places, but also provide Ireland with opportunities for economic development. However, to a large extent, the merger of Britain and Ireland was a measure taken by Britain in response to the French Revolution. The uprising in Ireland in 1798 caused Britain to turn its attention once again to this small island that, like itself, floats outside the European continent. The Irish Uprising of 1798 was an uprising that clearly had French support, as in August of, when General Jean Herbert, a soldier of the French Republic, led a 1000 strong army to land in Clara, in Mayo County, in western Ireland, and distributed weapons to Irish farmers who supported them.

In fact, due to the geographical particularity of the Irish and British islands, the measures taken by continental European forces to impose threats on the British mainland through Ireland have existed since ancient times. During the religious war, Spain supported Count Tyrone, who opposed Elizabeth I in Ireland. In 1689, former King James II of England, supported by France, led an army to land in Ireland and attempted to retake the throne based in Ireland. These historical cases may ultimately have led to the UK's decision to integrate Ireland into its own country.

Although there does not seem to be a strong connection between these events, there is a clue from the beginning to the end that the local forces of Ireland, especially the Catholic forces, have resisted the Protestant government in London with the assistance of foreign forces. The religious contradictions in Ireland have been the main theme of the history of the island of Ireland since Henry VIII converted to the Church of England. Irish Catholics were subjected to numerous oppression and

persecution in political, economic, cultural, and other aspects until the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, when the southern part of Ireland gained dominion.

This paper focuses on the important historical node of the Irish national liberation cause, namely the Catholic liberation movement in the 1920s. During this movement, the New Catholic Committee and the vast number of Irish Catholic farmers demonstrated amazing organizational and mobilization capabilities. The paper enumerates the situation and aspirations of various classes before the movement, and analyzes why the Catholic liberation movement could succeed and the role of religion in the nationalist movement.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the activities of religious groups in modern religious areas, such as religious groups and political parties in the Middle East, through the 19th century Catholic liberation movement. There are many similarities between the two. For example, the two also paid attention to the people in underdeveloped areas of the country, and used religious confrontation to call on and mobilize the masses. The two also developed well-known resistance organizations, such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 19th century Ireland and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The paper seeks to provide some insights and assistance for the future development of religious groups in the Middle East and for others to study the current situation of religions in the Middle East.

## 2. The Class Status and the Liberation Movement

In 1756, Mr. Curry, Richard O'Connor, and Thomas Wyse created the "Association of Catholic Ireland", opening the prelude to Catholic Empathy. However, the Catholic Emancipation at this time was still in its early stages, with the main force of movement mainly coming from the emerging middle class, which was significantly different from the climax of movement in the 1920s.

During this period, different classes had different ideas and aspirations in response to the rise of the middle class and the great upheaval that had occurred in the European continent. In the mid to late 18th century, with the continuous development of the New World, Atlantic trade became increasingly prosperous, and Ireland, as a part of Britain, also participated in the trade. The middle class of Irish Catholics, especially the merchant class, began to flourish and became increasingly dissatisfied with the existing restrictive policies towards Catholics. When the Navigation Act was passed by Parliament in 1651, Irish merchants were also allowed to freely trade between Britain and the British colonies.

However, in the 1760s, Britain first banned Ireland from selling goods directly to the colonies, and then banned the import of cheap Irish livestock into the UK. In the 1790s, direct sales of goods from the colonies to Ireland were also prohibited. The Association of Catholic in Ireland and various subsequent organizations are the weapons used by Irish Catholic traders to counter these restrictions. However, it should be noted that although the power of Irish Catholic merchants is stronger than ever, the main merchant class in Ireland is Protestants. Between 1809 and 1839, there were 330 people in Ireland who paid 15000 pounds or more in estate tax, but only 31 of them were Catholics [1]. The middle class was aware of their weakness, so in the second half of the eighteenth century, they tended to cooperate with Irish Catholic nobles and clergy. They were no longer limited to holding gatherings in Dublin, but began to invite Catholics from all over Ireland to participate.

For Irish Catholic nobles and clergy, it is difficult for them to make up their minds about the invitation of the middle class, because in the past, they have often been the most severely retaliated group in the process of confrontation with the Protestant government. Since the 17th century, the proportion of land held by Irish Catholics has experienced a precipitous decline. In 1600, Irish Catholics still owned 90% of the land, but after only a century, in the early 18th century, Irish Catholics only had less than 20% of the land left [2]. Because in the two civil wars in Britain, the Protestant government that won the war chose to confiscate the land of Irish Catholics in large numbers. When Cromwell ended the Irish rebellion, two thirds of the land of Irish Catholics who

participated in the rebellion and one third of the land of Irish Catholics who did not participate in the rebellion were confiscated.

In 1704, Catholic families were required to divide the land equally among their sons, unless the eldest son believed in the Church of England. This is why when Catholic businessmen first hoped to cooperate with Irish Catholic nobles and clergy, the nobles and clergy gave a very cold response. Their strength had been greatly weakened, and they were not willing to continue to confront the Protestant government. However, with the rebellion in the North American colonies, Irish Catholic nobles and Catholic priests took the opportunity to seek more rights from Britain, while Irish Protestant forces also took the opportunity to claim more autonomy.

Protestants in Ireland had sprouted nationalism in the early eighteenth century. Like the colonists of other colonies, they also aspired to obtain higher autonomy from the suzerain. The way Protestants strengthen their voice is to form a volunteer army. In 1775, the North American colonies rebelled. After 1777, the British army began to be at a disadvantage in the war in North America. Irish Protestants seized this opportunity. In 1778, Irish Protestants formed a volunteer army, which expanded from 40000 in 1780 to 100000 in 1792. At this time, the British government desperately needed these troops, so they made many compromises. In 1779, Irish ports were allowed to open to all non-belligerent countries in Britain, and Irish wool and wool textiles were allowed to be exported.

Irish Catholics were also relaxed during the same period, allowing them to hold land leases for a longer period of time (1999), and in 1782, Irish Catholics were granted the right to purchase and hold land. At the same time, restrictions on land inheritance were abolished. Protestants are happy to see the liberation of Irish Catholics. Protestants expressed their joy at alleviating the oppression of their fellow Catholics at a rally in 1782. Henry Grattan, the leader of Irish Protestant patriotism, also expressed “could [ing] the jarring elements of your country into a nation” [3]. The French Revolution of 1789 saw opportunities for Catholic businessmen. In 1793, Catholics with a net income of more than 40 shillings were granted the right to vote, and were allowed to obtain degrees from the University of Dublin and lower office positions. After that, however, the momentum of Catholic Emancipation began to decline. The Catholic aristocracy and Catholic clergy no longer actively supported Catholic Emancipation.

In 1799, Irish Bishop Dr Troy announced that he would accept the salary offered by the government, while acknowledging the government’s right to interfere with Rome’s appointment of Irish bishops. This decision was strongly opposed by Laity. O’Connell, one of the leaders of the Catholic Emancipation in the 1820s, believed that this would lead Irish bishops to become government puppets. In fact, most of the compromises made by the government so far have been the lifting of trade restrictions in Ireland and the lifting of restrictions on Irish jobs. Cultural and religious liberation is seen as a more important thing for Irish laymen and the vast majority of Irish farmers. Before 1793, Catholic families and Irish speakers were regarded as ignorant, Catholics were not allowed to serve as guardians of children under the age of 21 or orphans, and Irish people were restricted from celebrating Catholic holidays. After 1793, the exclusion of Catholic and Irish culture was widespread among Irish Protestants. John Eglinton, a famous Irish critic, believes that the Irish language lacks analytical skills and criticizes those who aim to revive Gaelic, even though he does not speak the Irish language himself [4]. At the same time, the Catholic priests are not united, and the new generation of Catholic priests do not want to become a puppet of the government. They are more willing to travel further afield to reach out to the largest Catholic farmers in Ireland.

### **3. The Climax of Catholic Emancipation and the Establishment of New Catholic Association**

After 1793, although Irish Catholics were somewhat liberated, 25% of Irish people still did not obtain the most basic citizenship [5]. In 1801, the Act of Union came into force and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was established. Since then, Ireland has no parliament, and Puritan

parliamentarians have participated in The Parliament of the United Kingdom in London. Ireland holds 100 seats out of the 658 seats in the British House of Commons [6]. In 1810, the Irish Catholic middle class submitted a petition demanding the lifting of all restrictions on Irish and Catholic people. The petition was so radical that the Governor of Ireland, Wellesey Pole, arrested them in 1811 [2]. In 1817, a motion for the liberation of Catholicism was proposed in both houses of Parliament, but the motion was defeated in the House of Commons by 245 votes to 221. In May 1819, Grattan raised the issue of Catholic liberation in the House of Commons and Donoughmore in the House of Lords, respectively. Sir Eldon raised his objection, which was supported by the House of Lords. The issue of Catholic liberation was once again stranded [7]. But the proposal of 1819 turned out to be defeated by 243 votes to 241 [8]. Despite repeated setbacks, Catholics are increasingly likely to succeed.

The experience of being oppressed by the Protestant government gave Irish Catholics and those who wanted to restore traditional Irish culture a reason to cooperate. The revival of Gaelic culture was the result of their cooperation. Bishop Thomas William Croke called on the Irish people to pick up the traditional movement in Ireland. The bishops and clergy at all levels of the church provided strong supports for the establishment and development of these organizations [2]. Although large-scale organizations did not emerge until the end of the 19th century, such as Gaelic Union, Gaelic Athletic Association, Gaelic League, and so on. However, without the support of Catholics, the establishment of these organizations to revive Gaelic culture was a major issue. Correspondingly, many traditional Irish cultures were also reversed in the New Catholic Association established in 1825.

In 1825, after the Association of Ireland Catholic was banned by Parliament, the New Catholic Association was established on July 13 of the same year. There is not much difference in purpose between the two, that is, to raise funds for Catholic Empathy. However, the New Catholic Association aims to develop harmony among all sectors of Ireland, including the Protestants of Ireland and the long neglected Irish Catholic peasantry. The New Catholic Association advocates the improvement of agricultural standards in its purpose. At the same time, in the amendment on July 23rd, Members are allowed to pay a one-penny monthly membership fee in four installments, which allows relatively poor Irish Catholic farmers to participate more widely. This approach ensures that there are enough people who can help to Donate. Thus, members could communicate on a more equal footing. At the same time, the news media were also allowed to watch the New Catholic Association's gathering, which allowed more people to have access to the gathering site, which conformed to its purpose of emphasizing freedom of opinion and maintaining religious tolerance in society. Compared to the Association of Ireland Catholic, the New Catholic Association was more inclusive and less vulnerable to repression by the Protestant government. By 1826, the New Catholic Association had collected nearly 20000 pounds of donations, which were later used for various activities, in addition to the expenses of organizing gatherings themselves, as well as for publicity and National licenses.

Donations were initially collected in town and quickly expanded to the most remote corners of Ireland. At first, the collectors were all voluntary in nature. The Rent Committee was established by the collectors in each parish to handle the tasks related to donations. The town was divided into several areas for collection by area. However, donations received would eventually be uniformly handed over to the New Catholic Association in Dublin. With the expansion of the number of donors, the size of the New Catholic Association was also expanded. Collectors of Catholic donations had their own offices and held weekly meetings to not only collect applications and remittances for Catholic donations, but also began to talk about public policies related to Catholicism.

The New Catholic Association in Dublin authorizes provinces to appoint an inspector to report on donations and appoint Church Wardens to assist in the donation process. Church Wardens was also responsible for investigating cases of persecution of free people in various parishes, and making public newspapers accessible to more people to understand the tragic situation of Irish Catholicism.

Every Saturday, the New Catholic Association distributes a copy of the *A Weekly Register to Church Wardens*, including reports on various speeches and resolutions of the New Catholic Association on Wednesdays and Thursdays. On Sundays, Church Wardens would read aloud at the gates of various Catholic churches, enabling parishioners to be exposed to the latest developments and developments in the New Catholic Association. In this way, Catholic believers could learn as quickly as possible about every policy and action from the New Catholic Association. This approach was effective, with Church Wardens' speeches attracting a large number of Catholic farmers, and Ireland's most populous class being concentrated.

Initially, the New Catholic Association was held in various provinces to facilitate the collection of donations. Later, the festival was also used to communicate and cooperate with Protestants, but it quickly became a club for Irish Catholic farmers. Catholic farmers were here to share their stories, express their opinions, and jointly imagine the future of Ireland. The council was very effective in disciplining the Catholic peasants, and the Catholics attending the council were uniformly dressed in green linen, with green branches in their hands and green micro-badges on each hat. sometimes in neat military formation, accompanied by their respective musical bands and led by officers, they would march through the various areas of the town [2]. It is also at this time that Ireland has emerged with a clear tendency towards cultural nationalism [4].

National census had to some extent stimulated the enthusiasm of Catholic farmers. The main task of the National census was to count the number of Catholics and the number of Protestants in the four Irish provinces of Connaught, Munster, Leinster and Ulster. We also calculated the ratio of Catholics to Protestants in each province. From the figures given, it is clear that despite centuries of brutal oppression, Irish Catholics maintained an overwhelming numerical advantage. In the province of Ulster, where the Protestant faith was most prevalent, Catholics still maintained a numerical advantage of twice as large. In other provinces they also maintained a huge advantage of ten or even twenty times. In total numbers, the ratio of Protestants to Catholics in Ireland in 1828 was roughly 1:10.

National census served a purpose far beyond that of the census itself. It did two main things. The first effect was to effectively refute the vague demographics of the population that preceded it. Censuses were taken in Ireland in 1672, 1731, and 1733, but the results of these censuses often showed a ratio of Protestants to Catholics of between 1:2 and 1:3 [2]. This is a very large difference from the National census data, which may be related to the fact that the Protestant population was intentionally or unintentionally exaggerated. The second effect was to put an accurate and credible population gap in front of the Irish, which was a huge shock to both Catholics and Protestants. For Catholics, it made many people who did not have a clear perception of their own power realize for the first time the absolute superiority of Catholicism over Protestantism. This perception of their own power inspired a large number of Catholic farmers who would fight harder for their rights against the British or Irish Protestant governments in the future.

Although Catholics with a net income of over 40 shillings obtained the right to vote, Catholics did not have the right to become parliamentarians, and the right to vote itself was often restricted by Protestant landlords. But when Catholic farmers joined forces through the New Catholic Association, the situation changed dramatically. In the general election of 1826, the New Catholic Association supported candidates who supported the Catholic Emancipation and won in areas such as Waterford and Armagh. In July 1828, O'Connell, one of the leaders of the Catholic Emancipation, participated in the election for County Clare. O'Connell obtained 2057 votes, while his opponent obtained only 982 votes [9]. This result ultimately forced the British government to promulgate the Catholic Relief Bill in 1929, whereby Catholics could hold any position except as kings, regents, governors, and British justices.

#### **4. The Powerful Mobilization Ability of Catholicism in Catholic Emancipation**

There is a significant difference between the Catholic Emancipation between 1825 and 1829 and the Catholic Emancipation at the end of the 18th century. The main body of the latter was the middle class and Protestants, who completed the initial liberation of Catholics. The main body of the former was a new generation of Catholic priests and Catholic farmers. Obviously, it was even more difficult to unite farmers distributed throughout Ireland, who were far apart from each other and had few connections. In fact, until the Catholic farmers won the general election in 1826, a considerable number of Protestants believed that the Catholic farmers were just a pack of sand. However, Catholic priests made these situations known to the public by understanding the plight of Catholic farmers, thereby bringing them together. The increase in food prices in Ireland after 1815 may have contributed to this [10].

The Gaelic tradition sponsored by Catholic priests was also deeply loved by farmers, who wore traditional costumes to participate in the council and march, and ultimately won the election. Of course, this also depended to some extent on the development of the printing industry, but Catholic priests seized this opportunity and successfully established a good image in front of the vast majority of Irish farmers. The success of Father Mathew's prohibition of alcohol in the 19th century partly depended on his good image of being close to the poor [11]. This image does not necessarily indicate how outstanding Catholic priests were, but the interests of Irish Catholic farmers had indeed been ignored by various classes for a long time. And interestingly, when the peasant class was oppressed and neglected for a long time, the missionary groups or religious forces would become allies with the peasants. This is largely due to the fact that priests as grassroots managers made it easier for them to reach out to the bottom farmers and understand their aspirations. Today, similar situations have occurred in some countries in the Middle East, such as Iran and Lebanon, where religious forces have restored grassroots governance, basic health care, and basic education in remote areas. In return, farmers are willing to fully support religious armed groups in their struggle against the aggressors.

#### **5. The Influence of Catholic Emancipation on Subsequent Nationalist Movements**

The victory in 1829 looked very spectacular, but left a lot of problems. The first was the limitations of the Catholic Relief Bill itself. While compromising, the British government added many restrictions, such as restricting the clothing of Catholics. And most importantly, the original limit of forty shillings was raised to twenty pounds. As a result, fewer than 5% of Irish people had the right to vote. Irish farmers were directly excluded. It was clear that this was done intentionally by the British government to prevent a repeat of the failure of 1826. For both Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, this was not a satisfactory outcome. This ultimately led to a more intense religious confrontation, internal divisions within Protestantism, and armed conflicts between Irish Catholics and Protestants lasting more than half a century.

#### **6. Conclusion**

Although Catholic Emancipation did not achieve ideal results, the events that occurred between 1825 and 1829 suggest that religious personnel had the ability to mobilize a large number of people in a short period of time due to their attribute as grassroots administrators. The more religious ideas were concentrated, the stronger their mobilization ability was. "They mobilize the masses not by rigid propaganda, but by meeting the specific spiritual or material needs of the local people, thereby allowing them to voluntarily follow religion." In areas of social unrest, the stronger their mobilization ability was. After understanding this, this article could help people gain a more comprehensive understanding of today's regions with intense religious issues, such as the Middle East.



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