

## APPENDIX 1

### Two Irish Clerics on Violence: Fr Walter McDonald & Bishop Daniel Cohalan

#### (1) Father Walter McDonald (1854 - 1920)

[Note: The author acknowledges Ricorso: A Knowledge of Irish Literatures as a source of biographical information for this article. ]

Walter McDonald was born in Mooncoin, Co. Kilkenny and educated at St Kieran's College, Kilkenny and at Maynooth. He was ordained as a priest in 1876 and taught at St Kieran's. He became Professor of Dogmatic Theology, Maynooth in 1881, was also for a time Professor of Canon Law and became head of the Dunboyne Establishment (for post-graduate studies) which position he held until his death.

#### *Scandal !*

In 1898 Dr McDonald published *Motion, Its Origin and Conservation* on the relationship between theology and science. The book received the approval of the official Dublin diocesan ecclesiastical censor the Dominican Louis Hickey. However following publication, some unfavourable hierarchical attention was focused on the book instigated in true faculty-style politics by McDonald's colleague Dr Daniel Cohalan – later Bishop of Cork. Dr McDonald was obliged to submit his book to Rome. It was duly condemned by the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Ledochowski. and the book was placed on the Index Librorum as contrary to Catholic doctrine on Free Will in December 1898. This theological scandal was to blight Father McDonald's career and – unlike his critic Dr Cohalan – he was never made a Bishop. However the Irish hierarchy did not regard Father McDonald as any kind of heretic, most of the bishops were embarrassed by the scandal and some had little idea of the theological issues involved. He remained Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Maynooth but five of his subsequent theological works were refused an imprimatur (official permission to publish).

Dr McDonald promoted open competition and academic tenure for professorial staff. He was permitted to publish *Principles of Moral Science* in 1903, on ethical principles transmitted by tradition. He was the main inspiration behind the foundation

of the *Irish Theological Quarterly* in 1907 but was soon forced to withdraw from the editorial committee in the context of disputes about the condemnation of “Modernism” by the Vatican. The original editorial team consisted of five Professors in the Theology Faculty in Maynooth. Apart from McDonald himself, there were Drs Patrick Toner, James McCaffrey, John Harty (later Archbishop of Cashel) and Joseph McRory (later Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh). The *Quarterly* was discontinued in 1922, two years after Dr McDonald’s death but refounded by Maynooth staff in 1951 and is still being published.

He supported Charles Stewart Parnell after the split and supported the unsuccessful Vatican appeal of Dr. Michael O’Hickey against dismissal from his Maynooth chair in 1909. (The issue was Father O’Hickey’s refusal to accept the hierarchy’s decision against the imposition of compulsory Irish as a requirement to attend university). He was also a supporter of James Larkin.

Dr McDonald was a friend of Sean O’Casey, he urged reforms in the managerial system in National Education and supported the right of Catholics to enter Trinity College Dublin. He published *Some Ethical Questions of Peace and War* in 1919, and *Some Ethical Aspects of the Social Question* in 1920. The former was a provocative book at the time since it questioned the ethics of the use of violence - or even of a hunger strike - and the demand for a separate Irish State. The fact that the author was an academic rather than a bishop, meant that the book attracted limited attention. However he published “*Some Ethical Questions of Peace and War: Postscript in Reply to Certain Criticisms*” in 1920.

Dr McDonald’s memoirs *Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor* were completed as he was dying. He died on 2 May 1920 at Maynooth. *Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor* was edited by his literary executor Denis Rolleston Gwynn and published in the UK in 1925 by Jonathan Cape. The book attracted a favourable review (entitled ‘*Reforming Priest*’) in the UK magazine *The Spectator* and a pained one in the Irish Jesuit review *Studies*. The *Spectator* reviewer commented that:

Some readers will regret that Mr. Denis Gwynn, his literary executor, has omitted a chapter giving a resume of his book on Peace and War. It would have interested a wide circle.

In his preface to the *Reminiscences*, Denis Gwynn wrote:

“The ecclesiastical censor [Westminster Diocese] reported that there was no theological objection to anything contained in the book .... but an Imprimatur was refused on the ground that no book which criticised the ecclesiastical system of the Irish Church so strongly could receive the appearance of official approval from an English diocese.”

Dr McDonald’s *A History of the Parish of Mooncoin* appeared in 1960.

After Vatican II, Fr. Walter McDonald was seen by some as a prophet born before his time and the *Reminiscences* were published in a new edition by Mercier Press in 1967. The IRA campaign in Northern Ireland also led to a revision of attitudes towards the use of violence to achieve a Republic. Thus, his *Some Ethical Questions of Peace and War, with special reference to Ireland* which had received comparatively little notice in 1919, was republished in 'Classics of Irish History', with an introduction by Tom Garvin (UCD Press 1998).\

Extract from the book "Goodbye to Catholic Ireland" by Mary Kenny (from Chapter 4 "Goodbye to Protestant Ireland")

For example, the bishops did play their cards rather close to their chest on the theology of war and peace. Though they generally condemned murder and upheld 'lawfulness' [note] they sometimes remained quiet on sensitive specifics in this period. When Father Walter McDonald, a doctor of divinity from Maynooth, brought out a provocative book in 1919 called *Some Ethical Questions of Peace and War with Special Reference to Ireland*, which really challenged the basis for a separatist Irish State using the classical philosophical arguments from St. Paul and St. Thomas Aquinas, it was greeted with a meaningful silence.

McDonald's moral questioning of the ethics of the hunger strike, too, was sensitive at a time when Terence MacSwiney, the adored republican Mayor of Cork, was dying: it was certainly not appropriate that MacSwiney's death should be thought a suicide – being a mortal sin and carrying a traditional stigma – and it is clear they could not bring themselves to think of MacSwiney, who did die on hunger strike as anything but a self-sacrificing martyr. Walter McDonald died himself in 1920, leaving behind a melancholy, disappointed, yet honest and self-accepting autobiography *Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor*, which is most shrewd and prophetic too, in warning against the signs, already present, of excessive censorship.

Mary Kenny also writes (on page 47) that "In the memoirs of priests, the faith of the mother is more usually portrayed as the source of strength and inspiration, as well, sometimes, as intellectual ambition (as in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, where

the drive, the ambition and the 'refinement' come from the mother)." She quotes from Fr McDonald's Reminiscences:

I love to think of my mother who was quite unlike – superior to – any other woman whom I have ever met, of her class .... She was always at work, heavy work very often, about the house – cleaning, washing, ironing, sewing, cooking; about the dairy – milking cows, setting milk, making butter and cleaning vessels, and even about the pigs and cattle – helping to prepare their food and to feed them. On Sundays, nevertheless ... she turned out quite genteel, though her dress was such as, till then, was worn by the married women of our place: frilled cap and hooded cloak, which my mother wore fairly rich and which became her admirably. I remember, above everything else, the reverent care with which she undressed us and put us to bed, reminding us of our guardian angels, and telling us how shocked they would be if they saw us do anything unseemly. She had been to school to the nuns in Mooncoin [Co. Kilkenny], who certainly trained her well.

This "refinement" was certainly reflected in Father McDonald's own career and possibly left him less well equipped, than his nemesis Professor – then Bishop - Daniel Cohalan, to deal with the violent reality of life in Ireland in the years 1919 and 1920 when he wrote his Reminiscences.

*Extract from the essay "Lost Voices" by Donal Flanagan in the book "Religion in Ireland" edited by Denis Carroll*

The last chapter of [Father Walter McDonald's] *Reminiscences* was written after he received the medical report that told him he had only a short time to live. The final paragraphs of this chapter, his testament and valediction to those he had long confronted, is tinged with sorrow yet alive with hope. The final paragraph runs:

*I have done my best and the result will be found in great part in the unpublished books that I leave behind ... for some such thoughts the time is not ripe but will come.*

McDonald continues:

I should dearly love to see these volumes published but must pass away without hope of that. They might do a little to withstand the revolution which the official guardians of our religion will not see coming or will endeavour to keep out with their broomsticks. Good men, animated by the best of motives but so short-sighted and so cruel, too, in their religious blindness to such as cannot shut their eyes. So God permits – no doubt for wise purposes; blessed always be His holy will. (*Reminiscences*, p 268-9)

And again:

*Episcopophobia! Yes I have faced Bishops and their Masters being worsted in the conflict and, as I believe, injured grievously. Not maliciously, however; the men who struck hardest at me did it in good faith. I do not blame them nor desire to see them punished, however I may feel aggrieved.*

*May they live long and rule happily, but may they be punished also, by being punished for the evil they have unwittingly, not to me only – for that counts little – but to the cause of Truth. The shame of such revelation when it comes, as come it will, is more than enough of punishment.* (p 269)

Facing death at peace and with confidence he writes:

*I am to die soon and perhaps as Lochiel's bard thought, in the sunset of life, we may be gifted with special insight into the future, somewhat akin to prophetic vision; or, at least, a dying man may utter warnings with more effect than if he had promise of many years before him.* (p 265)

McDonald died on May 2, 1920 and is buried in an unadorned grave in the college cemetery in Maynooth. The simple stone on his grave draws our attention to the fact that he died on the feast of St Athanasius. The phrase *Athanasius contra mundum* is loosely rendered as 'one, resolute man facing universal opposition'. Surely a fitting description of McDonald. And then Athanasius, who stood alone against the Arian heresy, was vindicated by its downfall. A lot that has happened since McDonald's death has borne out the prophetic character of much that he said. His words, not heeded by the monolithic official church of his time, have broken through to our day, as ecclesiastical certainties wilt and a faith with questions comes more and more into its own.

In his life McDonald found himself cast in the part of the honest outsider, a lonely role in the church which followed Vatican I. ....

McDonald commenting on Maynooth theologians' attempts to start the *Irish Theological Quarterly* in 1907, writes: '*We were unfortunate in the time at which our project was commenced, as the Modernists not only lamed but killed us. They aimed at progress, so did we, therefore we were modernists .... Is it not a strange sad thing that I, who not only hate modernism but feel a contempt for it, should be classed as a Modernist by so many, even high-placed ecclesiastics, as I know I am. The Modernists have set back the hands of progress in the church dear knows how many years – far beyond my time I expect ...*'

And in a typical McDonald shot: '*It was hypocritical and mean of Loisy and Tyrrell to pretend to remain in the church.*'

Yet for all his adventuresome spirit, McDonald was obedient. Here was a man who could write in the final and valedictory chapter of his memoirs:

*Few professors I dare to say – in all humility – have left in our college a record fairer than mine, of obedience to the rules and regulations made by the Trustees, wherever these rules did not in my opinion conflict with some more important and urgent principle. No President found me insubordinate or disrespectful, though I have resisted Presidents as has been shown. So, too, I have stood up to Bishops and even to the Holy See but reverently I hope, and in the exercise of right. We are subjects but not slaves of episcopal and papal authority. (Reminiscences, p 262-3)*

In his 1995 book, to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Maynooth College, Professor Patrick Corish wrote:

Maynooth's major flaw was summed up by Walter McDonald: "...we aim at producing good average men ... while our average man is very good, our best men are poor." [Maynooth College 1795-1995, Patrick J. Corish.]

On a large map of church and world, McDonald may appear today as only a minor prophet. But he showed the marks of the calling, felt the pain and endured the failure without flinching. It is this which makes him a paradigmatic figure among Irish Catholic voices which have been unlistened to, unheeded, lost.

Note: The teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Just War always weighed heavily with the Catholic Church, and 'lawful authority' played a key role with Aquinas as with St. Paul. Aquinas also holds that all other means must be tried first, that non-combatants should be protected and that there should be a good chance of winning. In 1917 Bishops Foley and Gilmartin had declared that conditions for a Just War did not exist in Ireland, on the grounds that constitutional means were available; the (British) Government was not regarded by most people as tyrannical; and a successful outcome was unlikely. But their Lordships also said they 'did not cast aspersions' on those who took a different view, at that time, which for some was a let-out clause. After the treaty General Election of 1922, when the people decisively voted for a settlement, the Church did anathematize the Republicans who continued the fighting.

**My Comment [Rory Connor]:** That is the view of theologian Donal Flanagan in his essay *Lost Voices* (published in the book "*Religion in Ireland – Past Present and Future*" in 1999). However it is also evident - from his own quotations from the *Reminiscences* - that Father McDonald would have great difficulties with the teachings AND the methods used by many of those who are pleased to regard him as a predecessor.

[Section on Bishop Daniel Cohalan follows.]