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Clerical Modernisers and the Media in Ireland: The Journalism of Fr Gerry Reynolds

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Abstract

This article analyses the journalism of Fr Gerry Reynolds in the context of modernisation in Ireland. Identifying Reynolds as a 'clerical moderniser,' it describes two periods in which he devoted a substantial amount of time to journalism: 1962-1975, when he worked for Redemptorist Publications and the Catholic Communications Institute; and 1987-1989, when he wrote a column for Northern Ireland's *Irish News*. In both periods, Reynolds emphasised Vatican II themes like the priority of individual conscience, laity and women, and ecumenism. It argues that like other clerical modernisers, Reynolds contributed to a cautious modernisation of Irish Catholicism from within.

Key Words

Modernisation, Catholic Church, Ireland, Media, Vatican II

Introduction

One of the ways that churches in Britain and Ireland responded to modernity was engaging with modern forms of mass communication, which became widespread during the twentieth century. In Ireland, some within the socially- and politically-influential Catholic Church regarded the media as a threat to their power and authority. But others within the Catholic

Church saw modern mass communications as a tool for inspiring and renewing faith. In Ireland, both Catholic traditionalists who feared modernisation and ‘clerical modernisers’ who embraced it sought influence through the media. Traditionalists and clerical modernisers are my own terms, a convenient shorthand to denote those who were wary of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and those who embraced it. Vatican II is generally considered an attempt by the international Catholic Church to engage with modernity. The reforms it set in motion provided those who were inspired by its vision with the resources to do so.

This article explores the journalism of one of those clerical modernisers: Fr Gerry Reynolds (1935-2015), a Redemptorist. While Reynolds’ ministry was long and varied, there were two periods in which he devoted a substantial amount of time to journalism. The first was 1962-1975, when he was based in Dublin and worked almost exclusively in journalism, first for Redemptorist Publications and then for the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference’s Catholic Communications Institute. The second was during Reynolds’ long tenure in Belfast’s Clonard Monastery (1983-2015), specifically the years 1987-1989, when he wrote a column for the *Irish News*, Northern Ireland’s largest newspaper for those of Catholic backgrounds. In both periods, Reynolds used the media to present a vision of the Catholic Church which could be described as modern. In line with Vatican II, Reynolds advocated a self-critical, reflective and outward-looking Catholicism that prioritised individual conscience, recognised the importance of laity and women, and embraced ecumenism. At the same time, Reynolds did not describe his journalism as a ‘modernising’ project; rather, he spoke about it in terms of a response to the spirit of God in Vatican II, without arguing that modernisation or secularisation should be considered a threat. Given that clerics are often characterised as fearing modernity and secularisation, Reynolds’ counter-example alerts us that we have not fully explored a full range of clerical perspectives on how twentieth century Irish society was changing.

Before moving to an examination of Reynolds' journalism, I describe modernisation in Ireland. Following Tom Inglis, I argue that the Republic of Ireland modernised 'late' when compared to Britain and Europe, and that Catholicism delayed modernisation in the Republic.¹ I also analyse the role of the media in contributing to modernisation and the decline of the Catholic Church, arguing that television was a decisive factor. Then, I describe how both traditionalists and clerical modernisers used modern forms of mass communications to get their message across. While much scrutiny of this period has focused on the conservative reign of John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin between 1940 and 1972, the media-savvy clerical modernisers who embraced Vatican II were more important than has been acknowledged. The Religious Congregation to which Reynolds belonged, the Redemptorists, were among Ireland's most prominent clerical modernisers. In the previous century Redemptorists were best-known for parish missions with fire-and-brimstone preaching. But by the 1960s they had turned their considerable energies to promoting changes flowing from Vatican II. To use Tom Garvin's terminology, while traditionalists in the Church seemed set on 'preventing the future', believing this would be good for the nation, leading Redemptorists saw something good *in* the future and tried to create a Church that would flourish in these changing times.²

Next, I outline the two periods when Reynolds was active in journalism. The first includes Reynolds' work with Redemptorist publications, in the Catholic Communications Institute, and in establishing and editing *Intercom*, a magazine for priests. It describes how Reynolds tried to start conversations about difficult and even taboo issues in the Catholic Church. I analyse his *Intercom* special issue on 'In Praise of Women,' and the polarised reaction to it. During the second period, Reynolds wrote a column for the *Irish News* called 'Communion.' Communion was presented as a series of short stories, which related the experiences of local Christians, reviewed areas of ecumenical agreement, publicised events,

and so on. I describe how Reynolds used Communion to challenge the sectarianism and violence of the Northern Ireland Troubles (1968-1998) and to advocate for ecumenism.

Garvin has argued that in the wake of Vatican II the ‘liberal wing’ of the Church ‘found itself in a minority’, with some modernising clerics ‘sent to the ecclesiastical equivalent of Siberia’. This made ‘Catholicism in Ireland ... the site of an intellectual tragedy, or, perhaps more accurately, an unintellectual tragedy.’³ Garvin is right: no analysis of contemporary Irish Catholicism would argue that clerical modernisers somehow ‘won the day’ and created a vibrant, modern Church of the future. But Garvin does not tell the whole story: clerical modernisers may not have won the day, but they did contribute to a cautious modernisation of Irish Catholicism from within. Ultimately, I argue that Reynolds’ journalism provides insights into how an Irish Catholic Church insider used the media to present the faith in fresh, compelling and ultimately modern ways.

The article draws on resources I have used in writing Reynolds’ biography.⁴ These include ‘life history’ interviews with Reynolds and interviews with his colleagues. My conversations with Reynolds about his journalism were situated in the context of his life as a priest. All quotations from Reynolds which are not cited in this article are from life history interviews conducted in 2015. I also analyse media authored by Reynolds or published under his editorship.

Modernisation in Ireland

Modernisation came late to Ireland. In making that claim, I am following Inglis, who argued that in contrast to Britain and other European societies, Ireland experienced a ‘late’ modernisation, one that did not begin until the 1960s. Inglis defined modernisation as ‘the advent of an industrial society in which religion becomes rationally differentiated from the

rest of social life, the state becomes separated from the Church, religious belief and practice become a private rather than public affair, the rational choice of individuals in the market place takes over from the pressures of tradition and community to conform; and production and consumption take primary importance over being spiritual.’⁵ This is a sociological perspective on modernisation, the limitations of which have been discussed by Brewitt-Taylor in this special issue. I concur with his argument that sociological conceptions of modernisation have explanatory value primarily in Europe and are not inevitable. Further, a relationship between modernisation and secularisation cannot simply be assumed, in Europe or beyond. Yet the sociological processes that modernisation theories describe have occurred across Europe, accompanied by shifts in discourses and changes in social structures, including measurable declines in religious practice and the creation of new relationships between church and state. Sociological definitions like Inglis’ do not explain everything, but they do help us describe historical processes in which declines in certain forms of religion can be quantified.

In 1960s Ireland, religious decline was not immediately obvious. In the early 1970s, more than 90 percent of the population of the Republic identified as Catholic, and weekly mass attendance was somewhere between 91 and 87 percent.⁶ The Catholic Church’s ‘moral monopoly’ seemed almost uncontested, shaping an all-encompassing Catholic *habitus* that disciplined people’s behaviours. The Catholic Church ran the state’s hospitals and schools, and Catholic social teaching was reflected in bans on contraception, divorce, and abortion in all but the most restrictive of circumstances. In Northern Ireland, Catholics were a minority and the Church could not be expected to influence the Protestant, unionist-dominated government that held sway until it was brought down by the Troubles in 1972. Yet even in Northern Ireland the Church controlled the education of people from Catholic backgrounds, and Catholics maintained similarly high levels of mass attendance. While the Republic’s ban

on contraception was lifted in 1980, dramatic changes in mass attendance and in divorce and abortion legislation would not occur during either period of Reynolds' work in journalism. These markers of religious decline came later, beginning in the late 1990s.⁷ Throughout the period covered in this article, the Irish continued to identify as Catholic and to attend religious services much more frequently than elsewhere in Europe. But there were many signs of modernisation of the type Inglis described, including the emergence of 'cultural' Catholics who conformed outwardly to religious practices but questioned or ignored the Church; and those who embraced modern forms of Catholicism that prioritised individual conscience.⁸

Inglis' perspective on Ireland's 'late' modernisation is not uncontested. R.F. Foster pointed out that the 'more conventional view' is that modernisation in Ireland began in the mid-nineteenth century and was 'mediated by the Catholic Church.'⁹ In this version, the Church's alliance with the British state (prior to the creation of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland in 1921) helped create and institutionalise practices that modernised the island. As J.J. Lee observed, 'The most rapidly expanding major institution in the country in the century after the famine was the Catholic Church,' which made it well-placed to shape modern Ireland. The Church attracted 'some of the finest performer talent in the country,' men and women of energy and ambition who were key agents in church and nation-building at home and abroad.¹⁰

Inglis supports aspects of this narrative. He noted that by the mid-nineteenth century the British state had acknowledged the failure of the penal laws or Protestant evangelism to convert Irish Catholics. Recognising the Church's ready-made bureaucracy, the British state gave the 'task of educating and civilising Irish Catholics over to the Catholic Church.'¹¹ The famine (1845-1852) had drastically reduced the population and exposed the vulnerability of small-scale farms; some have argued that it also prompted an existential crisis or 'devotional

revolution' in which the Irish turned to the Church.¹² In this context, Inglis argued that adherence to Church moral teachings contributed to practices like delayed marriage, long-term celibacy and bachelorhood, an emphasis on vocations (Irish mothers' encouragement for children to enter the priesthood and Religious orders was crucial in this regard) and emigration.

Yet Inglis also contended that in important ways the Church inhibited modernisation.¹³ Catholic teaching opposed 'materialism, consumerism and individualism,' making it 'an inhibiting factor in modernisation and industrialisation of Irish society.'¹⁴ Garvin concurred, noting a 'possibly anti-economic' political culture that was shaped by the 'Catholic Church's dislike of commerce and "unbridled" capitalism.'¹⁵ Such antipathy was less obvious in the six counties that became Northern Ireland, where the majority Protestant population was suspicious of the Catholic Church and resisted its influence.

Debates continue about the extent that Catholicism in the southern counties contributed to 'economic laggardness' and delayed the advent of a secularised, industrialised version of modernisation.¹⁶ But there is ample evidence that the hierarchy who led the Irish Catholic Church were suspicious of modernisation and tried to prevent it, or at least to mitigate its impact. From the early years of the Irish state, one way this was accomplished was through censorship. Louise Fuller argued that censorship was 'expressly designed to protect Irish Catholics from secularist or corrupting influences emanating from abroad.'¹⁷ Similarly, Michael O'Toole pointed out that World War II 'weakened' Irish journalism, as a combination of censorship and reduced resources meant that by its conclusion, most daily newspapers were only four pages long.¹⁸ The media also was deferential to the Church; before the 1960s churchmen sent journalists their 'homilies, statements, pastoral letters etc. with the ultimatum to print in full.'¹⁹ The hierarchy's pastoral letters during this era expressed fears of secularisation, liberalisation, 'evil modern tendencies' and 'the dangers of

the modern world.’²⁰ The hierarchy also wanted to shield the Irish from ‘foreign press and films ... and their corrupting influence.’²¹

The Role of the Media in Modernisation

But it was becoming clear that the hierarchy could not stop the ‘modern,’ ‘foreign’ influences which were reaching Ireland through modern forms of mass communications. Ireland moved quickly from an era when ‘the Mass house was the meeting house because there was nowhere else to go and nothing else to do,’²² to one in which diversions included ‘the wireless, the cinema, the dancehall, the motor car and the television.’²³ By the 1950s, Dublin and the east coast were receiving television transmissions from the BBC, creating concerns that the Irish would increasingly reject a frugal rural life and aspire towards so-called British values like consumerism. In 1958, there was a Government Commission tasked with setting up a television station, which included two representatives from the Catholic Church. It concluded that Ireland’s lack of a native television station was ‘an embarrassment’ and that the alternative to this was “‘a progressively increasing number of Irish viewers taking the BBC programme”, which was geared to a British audience and espoused British values.’²⁴ The Catholic Church initially thought it might exert its customary influence over RTÉ television. Foster noted that ‘Pope Pius XII himself ... enthusiastically anticipated [Irish television would be] a bulwark against irreligion, materialism and communism, and sent an envoy to Dublin to make the point.’²⁵ Eithne Conway, a television critic, hoped that Irish television could be used to evangelise the English.²⁶ Cardinal John D’Alton appeared in full regalia on the first RTÉ broadcast on 31 December 1961, assuring viewers ‘that they had nothing to fear from the chairman of the new RTÉ Authority.’²⁷

Both Fuller and Inglis argued that television was *the* decisive factor behind modernisation in the Republic, due to the unique role it played in dismantling the Catholic Church's control over public discourses and social practices. Inglis painted a picture of the family gathered round the television set in the evenings, a new ritual that replaced evening recitations of the rosary. The government did not ban foreign programmes. Even on RTÉ, the spontaneous, questioning nature of television programmes, more so than radio, made them almost immune from censorship. Perhaps the most influential of these was a live chat show, *The Late Late Show*. Gay Byrne, who presented the programme between 1962 and 1999, addressed controversial topics – and allowed his guests to do the same. In 1970, Fr Des Forristal wrote that the programme had ‘probably done more than any other single factor to form the national consciousness on a hundred different topics during the last ten years.’²⁸ Novelist Colm Tóibín said that ‘without it, it would have been possible for people to have lived and died in twentieth-century Ireland without ever having heard any discussion of sex.’²⁹

Other sectors of the media also had begun to critique the Catholic Church. Fuller traced this new tendency to the coverage of the government's efforts to pass the Mother and Child scheme, a healthcare programme, in 1951. The hierarchy, including the powerful McQuaid, proclaimed that the proposed legislation was against Catholic social teaching. Taoiseach (Prime Minister) John Costello decided not to implement the scheme, and Health Minister Noel Browne was forced to resign. Costello wrote to McQuaid to assure him of ‘the complete willingness of the government to defer to the judgement so given by the hierarchy ...’³⁰ In the aftermath of Browne's resignation, the lead editorial in the *Irish Times* proclaimed that: ‘the Roman Catholic church would seem to be the effective government of the country.’³¹ Given the *Irish Times*' historical associations with the Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, this might be expected. But Fuller claimed that in the wider coverage of the

event, ‘a challenge was offered to Church authority, and the ins and outs of that challenge were made public. ... [A] protracted debate now began in the newspapers and various journals on the subject of Church-state relations.’³²

During Vatican II, journalists reported on disagreements among those participating in Council debates, demystifying the Church for many Irish Catholics.³³ During the 1960s, media outlets appointed religious affairs correspondents who were unwilling to submit to the hierarchy’s commands. The hierarchy was resentful and suspicious of them because they were laypeople and were not trained as theologians.³⁴ On the other hand, clerical modernisers like Fr Austin Flannery (discussed below) respected journalists. As correspondent John Cooney reflected: ‘At a time when church leaders disdainfully regarded journalists, especially religion correspondents, as subversively dangerous demons opposing their omnipotent authority, Austin showed obvious liking, encouragement and sympathy for the company of the scribe species.’³⁵ These correspondents created excitement about the changes expected to flow from Vatican II. But when changes did not materialise as they had anticipated, tensions between the correspondents and the hierarchy grew.³⁶ For the rest of the twentieth century, the media continued to call the Church to account, so much so that Fr Oliver Rafferty SJ, writing in 2015, would declare: ‘the systematic determination in some sections of the media and the academy to dislodge Catholicism from its place in public life was a factor in Catholicism’s decline.’³⁷ In the 1990s and 2000s the media exposed the horror and extent of clerical sexual abuse over the previous century. This led Inglis to conclude that the media had achieved a dominance in Irish public and private life that ‘is far more pervasive and effective than the Church ever achieved.’³⁸

The Catholic Church and the Media: Traditionalists and Clerical Modernisers

The hierarchy who feared the growing power of the media to unleash modernity and secularisation were, to some extent, proved right. But there were some within the Church who, inspired by the vision of Vatican II, sought to use the media to emphasise the Council's central themes, including the priority of individual conscience; the imperative to empower laity, including women; and ecumenism, amongst others. Vatican II also issued a *Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication* (1963), which recognised the Church's responsibility to utilise modern means of communication. It recommended that the Church establish 'national offices' that would produce publications, films, radio and television programmes.³⁹

In Ireland, the Catholic media provided platforms for both traditionalists and clerical modernisers. Traditionalists are those who feared modernisation and to some extent tried to prevent it, fearing its consequences for the spiritual life of the nation; while clerical modernisers are those who embraced Vatican II, believing that social trends associated with modernisation could help create a better future in which the spirit would guide the Church towards greater freedom and openness. These terms are my own and can be considered empirical ideal types. McQuaid, often seen as a defining figure of the era, could be considered the arch traditionalist, with his famous dictum that Vatican II would not upset the 'tranquillity' of Irish Catholics' Christian lives.⁴⁰ But even though McQuaid often reprimanded clerical modernisers, it would be inaccurate to draw too sharp a dichotomy between traditionalists and modernisers. Probably many Irish Catholics – clerical and lay – lived out their faith on a spectrum between the traditional and modern, rather than neatly falling into oppositional camps. Sometimes traditionalists and modernisers worked together. Indeed, they cooperated in using and creating specifically Catholic forms of mass communication. They also managed to put their perspectives across on the state media and in other popular outlets. At the same time, the distinction between traditionalists and clerical

modernisers is useful because it exposes an important dividing line along which there was real disagreement and dissent.

During this time, the importance of the Catholic media in Ireland should not be underestimated. Bryan Fanning argued that ‘five influential journals’ provided the intellectual and practical underpinnings of modern Ireland. Two of these – *Studies* and *Christus Rex* – were part of the Catholic media.⁴¹ *Studies*, which was founded by the Jesuits in 1912, gradually embraced and shaped modernising trends. Its contributors included lay academics and intellectuals. Fanning concluded that it was, ‘Arguably, the most important intellectual journal in post-independence Ireland.’⁴² *Christus Rex*, founded in 1947, was a sociology journal that ‘reflected the dominant Church anxiety about social change, secularisation and loss of intellectual influence in the universities.’⁴³ Its contributors were primarily clerical academics and its project was ‘inherently conservative’ and ‘anti-modernist.’ At the same time, much of the research in *Christus Rex* was rigorously empirical, including investigations of rural decline and emigration. Fanning argued that this ‘narrow empiricism’ reflected an ‘uncritical modernity,’ even as those who championed it ‘resisted secular social theory’ in favour of neo-Thomist philosophy.⁴⁴

In the years after Irish independence, *Studies* was traditionalist, promoting Catholic social thought ‘against British and European socialism.’ Like *Christus Rex*, it reflected the dominant Irish intellectual currents of neo-Thomism and Catholic cultural nationalism.⁴⁵ In 1951, *Studies* supported the hierarchy by opposing the Mother and Child scheme. But change was afoot; a new editor, Fr Roland Burke-Savage SJ, who worked in that capacity from 1950 to 1968, began to promote socialist and liberal thought. *Studies* also critiqued social inequalities, Irish nationalism/republicanism and its approach to violence in Northern Ireland, and asked how Irish literature might be revived in the aftermath of decades of censorship.

Studies laid the groundwork for two other influential Catholic journals: *Doctrine and Life* (1946) and the *Furrow* (1950). *Doctrine and Life* was published by the Dominicans, from 1946 as part of its *Irish Rosary* magazine and from 1951 as a stand-alone journal. Fr Austin Flannery OP, editor from 1958 to 1988, was an enthusiastic proponent of Vatican II and a social justice campaigner. *Doctrine and Life* reported extensively on Vatican II and published conciliar texts and commentaries. In 1964 it published the full text of the Council's Liturgy Constitution and a commentary on it, the first in English. This was republished as a book, which ran to eight editions.⁴⁶ In fact Flannery translated all the Vatican II documents and post-conciliar pronouncements.⁴⁷

The *Furrow* was founded by Rev Dr J.C. McGarry, Professor at St Patrick's College Maynooth, who became its editor. His co-editor was Redemptorist Fr Seán O'Riordan, who adapted the name of the journal from an Austrian Catholic publication, *Die Furche*. O'Riordan taught at the Redemptorist seminary and was among Reynolds' instructors. The *Furrow* initially had a pastoral focus, to help clergy cope with changing times. A trust was established to govern it, which allowed it to be independent of the seminary at Maynooth. It was printed in the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, which helped it avoid the interference of McQuaid – who nevertheless complained about it.⁴⁸

The *Furrow* published a range of articles, including book, radio and film reviews; papal documents and Irish bishops' statements; and sermon notes. It avoided comment on the Mother and Child scheme altogether. Fuller put this down to McGarry's efforts to be 'an acrobat,' balancing between conservatism and change, as he sought to keep as wide as possible a readership on board.⁴⁹ The *Furrow* also included a correspondence section to encourage interaction with readers. There were themed issues on topics like the role of the laity, emigration and Christian unity.⁵⁰ The effort to foster dialogue and critical thinking was 'novel, to say the least, for a clerical readership, which had been schooled in a very closed,

authoritarian climate.’⁵¹ The *Furrow* came into its own with its coverage of Vatican II. O’Riordan and fellow Redemptorist Fr Frederick Jones reported on the Council. Like the religious affairs correspondents in the secular media, O’Riordan and Jones’ coverage was frank and open, rather than deferential. Fuller argued that their ‘reports have been seen by many as popularising the Council for Irish priests, well before the Irish Church as a whole perceived the significance of [the] event.’⁵² She concluded that the clerical modernisers who wrote in these journals were well-ahead of the Irish bishops in sensing the scale and magnitude of the change that was afoot; without them, ‘both clergy and people would have been considerably more disturbed by, and less prepared for, the profound changes instigated by the conciliar reforms.’⁵³

Despite his personal misgivings about modernisation and the mass communications accompanying it, McQuaid recognised the Catholic Church must engage in this brave new world. In 1959, he sent two priests from his diocese, Fr Joe Dunn and Fr Des Forristal, for training in television techniques at the New York Academy of Broadcasting Arts. This was more than two years before RTÉ television was established.⁵⁴ In 1965, the Irish bishops announced a communications centre, which opened in 1967 under Dunn.⁵⁵ As Diarmaid Ferriter concluded, ‘Religion was also being viewed as a business that had to adapt and the Catholic Communications Centre was applying its work to slick marketing and business techniques.’⁵⁶ In 1969, the bishops’ conference created the Catholic Communications Institute (hereafter Institute), a merger of the Communications Centre and the Catholic Truth Society; today it is known as Veritas. The lay fraternity the Knights of Columbanus contributed £35,000 and the Catholic Truth Society £55,000 for the new Institute.⁵⁷ Both organisations were regarded as traditionalist at the time: by 1964 the Knights had set up 29 ‘watch committees’ around Ireland to monitor the content of RTÉ television;⁵⁸ while Fuller judged the Truth Society too polemic for the emerging modern age.⁵⁹ The Institute produced

radio and television programmes and the magazine *Intercom*, a specialist publication for priests. It also ran journalism training courses.

The Institute was responsible for a weekly programme for Radio Eireann, Network, and the iconic Radharc television programme on RTÉ. Radharc, which means vision in Irish, ran from 1962-1996 with a film unit staffed entirely by Catholic priests, including Dunn, Lemass and Forristal. It produced over 400 programmes, filming in more than 75 countries. Fuller called Radharc ‘the most successful example of a new approach to religious broadcasting in Ireland,’ arguing that its concern with global issues contributed to ‘the formation of the kind of broader social consciousness that was absent in Irish Catholics in the earlier period.’⁶⁰ Clerical modernisers also employed a ‘populist style’ that was better-suited to the modern media. This was epitomised in *Outlook* (1968), a five-minute religious programme broadcast at the end of RTÉ’s evening television schedule. Flannery, the long-time editor of *Doctrine and Life*, presented most of the *Outlook* programmes, focusing on social justice issues.⁶¹

To a remarkable degree, the Catholic Church put its perspectives across not only in its own specialist publications, but also in the mainstream media, including RTÉ television. It is notable that the Church’s media ventures were instigated and supported by traditionalists in the hierarchy, and lay Catholics who were wary of modernisation. But it seems that those who produced Catholic media were more likely to be identified with the clerical modernisers than with the traditionalists. Historians have tended to focus on the conservative influence of McQuaid during this period. Yet Ferriter has pointed out that ‘there has been too much attention focused on [McQuaid’s] personal rigidity at the expense of an analysis of those who strove to make the Church more adaptable, relevant and accessible.’⁶² The Redemptorists were among Ireland’s most prominent clerical modernisers, and they grasped the importance of the media for putting their message across.

The Redemptorists as Clerical Modernisers

Reynolds joined the Redemptorists in 1952. Around this time, some prominent members of its Irish Congregation were influenced by the ‘new’ theology from the Continent, which engaged with modernity.⁶³ But at the beginning of the twentieth century it was not obvious that the Redemptorists in Ireland would play a modernising role. Founded by Alphonsus de Ligouri in 1732, their original mission was to serve the rural poor of Naples’ mountainous regions. The Redemptorists arrived in Ireland in 1851, a small band of just five priests: two Flemish-speaking Belgians, an Austrian, a Russian and a convert from the Church of England.⁶⁴ They had been invited to give a parish mission in Limerick. It was the immediate aftermath of the famine, and a period of great institutional expansion under the new Archbishop of Armagh, Paul Cullen. Cullen had called the Synod of Thurles (1850), which explicitly ‘instructed bishops to organise missions as a means of instructing the people in the faith and of driving away the danger of error.’⁶⁵ The Jesuits and other newly-arrived Religious Congregations like the Rosminians (1848) and the Passionists (1849) had already begun missions. But over the course of the coming century, the Redemptorists became renowned for their missions. As Fr Michael Kelleher, a former Provincial, wrote: ‘For many Irish people, the word “Redemptorist” is synonymous with “parish mission” or solemn novena. There are few parishes in Ireland that have not experienced at least one Redemptorist parish mission in the last 160 years.’⁶⁶ The Redemptorists’ preaching tended to be of the fire-and-brimstone variety; the novelist John McGahern ‘saw many of the preaching Redemptorists as performers, appreciated like horror novels.’⁶⁷ Kelleher acknowledged that Redemptorist missionaries ‘provided colour and entertainment in times when there was little of

either, especially in the countryside' and left their 'mark on the Irish Church, on Irish literature and on the Irish Catholic psyche.'⁶⁸

In the years leading up to Vatican II, Irish vocations to the Redemptorists grew steadily. In the 1950s, it was common for there to be around ninety students in formation, with equally high numbers in the novitiate. The Irish Redemptorists also had vice-provinces in the Philippines and India.⁶⁹ The numbers of missions they preached in Ireland increased year on year, from 152 in 1950 to 225 in 1962.⁷⁰ Worldwide, there were around 9,000 Redemptorists, making it among the ten largest Religious Congregations of men in the world.⁷¹ The Redemptorists held 'general chapters' in 1963 and 1967-1969, international gatherings that were tasked with responding to Vatican II. Jones, who along with O'Riordan had reported on Vatican II, was elected to the general council. These chapter meetings substantially revised the Redemptorists' 1749 rule. Fr Brendan McConvery recognised that for many, the envisioned changes were so radical that they 'seemed the death-knell' for the Congregation as they had known it.⁷²

The new rule and the changes flowing from Vatican II were by and large embraced by Redemptorists in Ireland. Yet change could be difficult for men who had joined the Redemptorists in an earlier era; its challenges are described in Fr Tony Flannery's *The Death of Religious Life*. Flannery included the image of elderly priests going down the stairs early in the morning to pray, being met by younger Religious going up the stairs after a night out.⁷³ McConvery also recognised that it was 'a challenging time for religious life': in just one year, 1967, 15 Redemptorist students left their training; and other newly-ordained men left the priesthood.⁷⁴ Reynolds also questioned his vocation, writing: 'Sometime in the late 1960s when priests of my age were leaving the ministry I began to wonder was my being a priest due more to the influence of the kind of family I grew up in, than a response to a personal call from Jesus to give the whole of my life to him in celibacy for the sake of the kingdom.'⁷⁵

Fr James McGrath, who became Provincial in 1969, encouraged the Redemptorists to see change as an opportunity for renewal.⁷⁶ He supported intellectuals like O’Riordan, Jones and Gerry Crotty, who spread the new theology among their fellow Redemptorists and throughout the Irish Church. The Redemptorists also revised their approach to parish missions, which included emphasising prayer and personal bible reading (another imperative of Vatican II). The missionaries sold the *Good News Bible*, which McConvery noted ‘was possibly the first time that many Irish Catholics had a bible for personal use as distinct from a large family bible that was more of an ornament than something to be read regularly.’⁷⁷ The old fire-and-brimstone sermons gave way to a gentler message about Christ’s redemption and the importance of Christians’ individual conscience.⁷⁸ In the 1970s the Redemptorists also pioneered a new type of ministry centred on novenas, held in Redemptorist churches each June in preparation for the Feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Fr Vincent Kavanagh is credited with ‘transforming’ the novena into a ‘festival of faith’ that in time seemed a more effective and attractive means of engagement than the parish missions.⁷⁹

Dr Con Casey, a former Provincial, recalled a conversation with *Doctrine and Life* editor Flannery in the 1990s, where Flannery said: ‘When Vatican II came the Redemptorists were foremost in embracing it and in expressing it in their extensive work – they were an influential group within the Church. ... I think it is true most Redemptorists grasped Vatican II and exemplified that new way of thinking of being Catholic.’⁸⁰ This ‘new way of thinking’ was expressed in a devotional book published by Fr John J Ó Ríordáin in 1980. Writing just 15 years after the close of Vatican II, when Irish Catholics still seemed devout, Ó Ríordáin observed that people had rejected the ‘institution’ of the Church and in that context, ‘Vatican II’s message of freedom and fidelity is music to the ears; for our popular religious tradition is at once faithful to the point of apparent fatalism and fresh, free-flowing, and unpredictable as a mountain stream.’⁸¹

O’Riordan’s towering influence through the *Furrow* has already been discussed. In interviews, Reynolds emphasised O’Riordan’s and Crotty’s importance to him as instructors at the seminary. There was a document among Reynolds’ papers in which he reflected on O’Riordan’s impact on his life, and his wider importance to the Redemptorists’ twentieth-century mission⁸²:

... He was one of the very gifted teachers of theology in 20th century Ireland. More than any other person in his generation he helped his fellow Redemptorists to proclaim the Gospel with joy and to be compassionate and inspiring confessors.

... Things Spirit-filled people say remain with you always. I remember Fr Sean giving a lecture to the whole student body on the liturgy of the Church. To describe our faith encounter with the Lord in the sacraments he quoted in Latin from Pope St Leo the Great: “*Facies ad faciem te in tuis sacramentis invenio*”. “*Face to face in your sacraments I find you*”. That’s what Fr Sean wanted us to remember. The message is enough for a life-time’s meditation.

I remember him telling us that he had found in his conversations with Protestant people in Belfast that many of them had a great personal love for Jesus. He was bearing witness to what he had come to know in his pastoral visits to Clonard church every November in the 1950s to explain the Catholic Faith at the “Mission to non-Catholics”. His account of that ministry created in me a sense of communion in the love of Jesus with people of the Protestant tradition.

Reynolds’ reference to O’Riordan’s participation in Clonard’s ‘mission to non-Catholics’ draws attention to how even prior to Vatican II, Redemptorists were pursuing what would become one of its main emphases. The proto-ecumenical mission to non-Catholics was

established in 1948, when Reynolds' uncle Fr Gerard Reynolds was rector in Clonard. The yearly mission consisted of a series of six 'non-polemical' talks on aspects of Catholic belief, designed to engage with Belfast Protestants.⁸³ It continued until the late-1960s and is considered the origins of Clonard's ecumenical mission, in which the younger Reynolds would have a seminal role.⁸⁴

While ecumenism was a major theme of Vatican II, it had greater urgency in Northern Ireland than in the Republic – or in many other parts of the world, for that matter. Protestants and Catholics had been divided for centuries along ethno-religious lines, and religion had been used to justify violence.⁸⁵ Protestants were a majority and Catholics often felt they were treated as second-class citizens. In contrast, in the overwhelmingly Catholic Republic, Foster seemed almost bemused that the 1960s brought 'an interest in ecumenics,' remarking wryly that ecumenism was 'a reassuringly easy option ... where Protestants then mustered only 3.5 per cent of the population. (Enthusiastic ecumenists must have sometimes wondered if there would even be enough Protestants to go round.)'⁸⁶ Ferriter also acknowledged the tameness of ecumenism in the Republic, noting that 'Irish Catholics in the main were wholly welcoming of ecumenism as they finally got a peep inside Protestant churches they had long been curious about, and indeed on gaining entry wondered what all the fuss was about.'⁸⁷ But the experience of Clonard during the Troubles, located on an interface between one of the most violent and religiously-segregated areas of Belfast, continually reminded the Redemptorists that ecumenism was not always an easy option. Reynolds was an enthusiastic ecumenist even before he was assigned to Clonard.

Fr Gerry Reynolds' Journalism: Dublin, 1962-1975

Reynolds was ordained in 1960 and assigned to Dublin in 1962, where he worked primarily in journalism. He built on the efforts of pioneers like O’Riordan, working alongside some of the most important clerical modernisers of the period. He also was a hospital chaplain and organised clubs for young single people.⁸⁸

Redemptorist Publications

Reynolds worked exclusively on Redemptorist publications until 1969. The publications included magazines and pamphlets as well as the Redemptorists’ magazine, *The Redemptorist Record*, which was aimed at a lay readership. He said he served as ‘a kind of office manager’ and ‘worked with promoters of the magazine around the country.’ Reynolds was also involved in setting up the Religious Press Association (RPA), which included not only Catholic publications and journalists, but also people from the *Church of Ireland Gazette* and *Presbyterian Herald*. He became Chair of the RPA in 1969. *The Redemptorist Record* covered Vatican II, with the editor, Michael O’Connor, publishing what Reynolds thought was the first article about the Council in an Irish publication. He said: ‘There was no great public enthusiasm for the Council. But then it took off when the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* appointed special journalists to report on the Council.’ Rather than taking their lead solely from the Catholic hierarchy, these journalists reported on the Council in a more detached way. Reynolds’ analysis confirmed that of historian Fuller, described above.⁸⁹

The name of *The Redemptorist Record* was changed to *Reality* in 1966. This was just a few months after the end of Vatican II and during the 50th anniversary year of the birth of the Irish state.⁹⁰ Reynolds said: ‘It was a time of new beginnings and a time of questioning. You know: “What’s this new nation all about? What do we want to create? What do we want to achieve?”’ Reynolds saw *Reality*, along with other Irish publications like the *Furrow* and

Doctrine and Life, as creating space for the ‘thinking Catholic’ to ponder their faith and the issues of the day. *Humanae Vitae* (1968), an encyclical letter by Pope Paul VI, confirmed conservative Catholic teaching on contraception. He said: ‘I don’t want to say that *Reality* helped people to make up their minds, because I don’t think we had the freedom really to discuss [*Humanae Vitae*]. I mean, anything that would have been critical of Pope Paul’s teaching wouldn’t have gotten through. But there would have been criticism and a kind of pastoral application of his teaching.’

O’Connor was the editor of *Reality* and ‘his contribution was significant and important – he tried to grapple with issues and questions.’ The first issue of *Reality* included an article in which O’Connor, drawing on the work of Vatican II, challenged the Dublin diocese to require every parish to have a regular mass in the Irish language. ‘He got in a spot of bother with Archbishop McQuaid over that. ... For the next issue, Jackie [White, the then-Provincial] wrote an apology.’ After that O’Connor’s work had to go through a censor. Nevertheless, Reynolds was excited by the content of the magazine and inspired by O’Connor’s leadership.

The Catholic Communications Institute

Reynolds began working in the Catholic Communications Institute (hereafter Institute) in 1969. Reynolds edited *Intercom* and worked with Dunn and a layman from England, Doug Grainger, on the journalism courses. Reynolds recalled securing RTÉ journalist John O’Donoghue, presenter of a current affairs programme *7 Days*, to teach on a course about ‘how the religious press should function.’ Because *7 Days* could be critical and controversial, ‘I suppose this made us appear like we were upsetting the applecart a bit. But we were naïve, too.’ Reynolds wrote to McQuaid to inform him about the seminar with O’Donoghue. He

said, ‘I remember the letter I got back: “Thank you for telling me about this seminar, *which is to take place in my diocese in two days’ time,*” or something like that. Really, the message was that you have to be more respectful. But all that was part of being young and foolish.’

Intercom was originally launched for just six months in 1970 to raise awareness of Catholic World Communications Day. Reynolds, Grainger, and Forristal were the initial editorial board. The Bishops Conference wanted to use World Communications Day to fundraise for the Institute. *Intercom* was distributed without charge to priests across Ireland, with articles urging them to promote fundraising in their parishes. Reynolds interviewed Dunn in the first issue, in which Dunn explained: ‘on ... World Communications Day, people will be asked not only to pray for the Church’s work in communications (which they have been asked to do other years) but for the first time they will also be asked to contribute to the work of communications, and in particular to the work of the Institute.’⁹¹ Dunn travelled nearly 9,000 miles in the build up to World Communications Day, speaking to priests and urging them to promote the collection.⁹² But *Intercom*’s ambitions stretched beyond fundraising. It carried articles designed to help priests improve their own communications skills, and invited contributions from readers, with the aim of acting as ‘a medium of communication between priests in Ireland – if you like, a kind of clerical house-journal.’⁹³ The ‘Dear Father’ column on the opening page of the first issue put it like this:⁹⁴

When you come to think of it, most of our work is communication in one form or another. We will cover a lot of topics in future issues from how to appear on TV to the best way of running a parish magazine, from advice on using microphones in Church to reviews of recent books on communications. In particular, we will devote special attention to preaching. Despite what the electronic boys may say, despite the all-electric priests and the switched-on clerics, we are convinced that the Sunday

sermon is still the most important channel of communication in the Church. Anything that can be done to make it more effective is well worth the effort.

Intercom's May 1970 issue featured four sample communications-themed sermons for World Communications Day. On page two, there was a large text box reminding priests to fundraise: '... If the collection is a failure, then the Institute will be forced to cut back on what it is already trying to do. ... Success or failure in raising this amount depends on the priests of Ireland because they are the only people who can explain our needs to the Irish people.'⁹⁵

The collection raised £129,000 – short of the £156,000 goal but enough to erase the Institute's debt. *Intercom* proved so popular that it was continued, with Reynolds as sole editor. As editor, Reynolds had a potential audience of every priest in Ireland and could choose what topics to focus on. He said, 'I would try to break new ground and talk about things they normally didn't talk about.' Reynolds recruited contributors who wrote about (and promoted) ecumenism and greater interaction between priests and laity. This is how he explained his editorial approach to the *Echo* in 1976⁹⁶:

I am a believer in the fact that example is a much more compelling thing than argument to prove that something is good to do. If another person has done something successfully that will move other people to imitate and copy. I tried to put the spotlight on the kind of priest and church person who was a trailblazer.

Reminiscent of McGarry and O'Riordan's approach in the *Furrow*, Reynolds also encouraged feedback for the letters page, and faithfully presented the varying and often contradictory opinions of those who wrote to him. *Intercom*'s letters pages provide ample evidence that the issues he addressed generated passionate debate.

In Praise of Women

One of Reynolds' more daring forays was a special issue called 'In Praise of Women.' He said: 'I ... got priests to talk about women in their lives whom were friends, and all of that. I did that near the end of my days. I think that was good, but it was probably a bit brazen in the way I did it. Some of the people who wrote for me, they wrote anonymously. I mean, the priests were imprudent. But I let anyone who wrote for me speak as they spoke. But I didn't put credits for any of the pieces for it, so I suppose there was annoyance that I'd done it the way I did.'

The very first line of Reynolds' opening editorial read: 'This is the first time *Intercom* has treated at length of celibacy and love in a priest's life.' The special issue consisted of reflections from seven priests on their friendship with women, reflections from seven women (two married, two single and three nuns), and an article by Fr Donal Dorr on the 'Languages of Love,' which reflected on the distinctive features of celibate love and how celibate love is a gift for the Church. Reynolds wrote: '... we could all do with help to understand our need of women friends and to cope with the growth of such friendship in our lives.'⁹⁷

Reading the contributions more than 40 years after they were written, they do not sound as scandalous as they probably did in their contemporary context. Almost every priest pointed out that Irish seminary life had created in them unhealthy perspectives about women – something that would now probably be considered a well-known fact. One said that priests 'accepted the view that the priesthood excluded any close friendships with women. ... we sublimated our urges into theorizing and generalizing about the priesthood;'⁹⁸ another wrote, 'All during seminary life, and for some time afterwards there were just no females around.'⁹⁹ Indeed, one of the female contributors confirmed this, writing: 'Nothing in our Irish heritage or in our "Irish" Catholic upbringing has prepared the laity of this country for acceptance of our priests as normal men with the physical and emotional needs of normal men for the company of the opposite sex. For this, the laity are probably less to blame than the clergy

themselves.’¹⁰⁰ The more ‘imprudent’ contributions were those of priests who wrote lines like: ‘As a priest seeking to accept female companionship I had a few humbling experiences of my frailty. You could say that I learned the celibate lifestyle by trial and error;’¹⁰¹ and, ‘It was not long till I became painfully and frighteningly aware that we were in love with one another. This, I felt, was the beginning of the end! I was breaking up a happy marriage and what of my celibacy!’¹⁰²

The special issue generated intense debate in *Intercom*’s letters page. There was little middle ground amongst those who put pen to paper, although the critical voices outnumbered the supporters. A few examples will suffice: ‘Your “In Praise of Women” does little credit to the intelligence of men, as some of their contributions must rank as the worst drivel to appear in *Intercom*;’ ‘The contributions published in the current issue ... are an insult to the probity of priests and to the intelligence of your readers. The damage they could do to religion if they fell into the hands of lay people is incalculable;’ and, ‘You have done a good job and brought out into the open an issue that too often is whispered behind closed doors and treated by many with suspicion and fear.’¹⁰³

Reynolds was already on his way out of journalism when ‘In Praise of Women’ was published. He had been appointed rector of the Redemptorists at Mount St Alphonsus in Limerick in August 1975. The significance of Reynolds’ journalism was recognised when he won the *Catholic Standard*’s 1975 ‘Churchperson of the Year’ award.¹⁰⁴ A newspaper article reported: ‘Fr Reynolds was chosen by a top panel of notable churchmen and was selected from a total of more than 77 priests, nuns, and laymen nominated for the award.’ The article quoted Fr Peter Lemass in his capacity as Dublin Archdiocese Information Officer, who said it was Gerry’s work as editor of *Intercom* and his involvement with the singles clubs that ‘brought [him] into the public eye’: ‘... *Intercom* has done a great deal to bring about intelligent change in the Church in Ireland.’¹⁰⁵

Reynolds saw the award as reflective of what others were doing, drawing attention to the contributions of women and laypeople: 'I do not think that what I have done is any different from anything that lots of priests, sisters and lay people are doing for the Church in Ireland at the moment.'¹⁰⁶ Lemass' comment about 'intelligent change' neatly captured the clerical modernisers' project of creating a self-critical, reflective Church that valued individual conscience, laypeople and women, and ecumenism.

Fr Gerry Reynolds' Journalism: Belfast, 1987-1989

Reynolds was posted to Belfast's Clonard Monastery in 1983 and remained there until his death in 2015. During this time he emerged as one of the Irish Catholic Church's leading advocates of ecumenism, participating in public ecumenical initiatives like the Cornerstone Community and the Clonard-Fitzroy Fellowship; and creating two significant initiatives of his own: the Unity Pilgrims, a group of Catholics who join Protestant congregations for worship on Sunday mornings; and In Joyful Hope, a 'Eucharistic fellowship' in which Christians of different traditions attend and observe each other's Eucharistic services.¹⁰⁷ He also assisted his Clonard colleague Fr Alec Reid in his efforts to bring the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Sinn Féin into secret talks with nationalists in the Social and Democratic Labour Party, the Irish and British governments, and Protestant clergy.¹⁰⁸ Reynolds recognised that the causes of conflict in Northern Ireland were complex. But he was convinced that religion had contributed to the violence down the centuries, and believed that these 'sins' gave the churches a responsibility to change their ways and promote peace. For Reynolds, ecumenism was not only a mandate of Vatican II and therefore crucial (to use the terms of this article) to the modernisation of the Church – it also was a means of contributing to peace.

In this context, Reynolds briefly returned to journalism between 1987 and 1989, writing a regular column called 'Communion' for the *Irish News*. Portions of Northern Ireland's media are segregated along political-religious lines, and the *Irish News* is the major newspaper for people of Catholic/nationalist/republican backgrounds. Using the penname Couturier in homage to Fr Paul Couturier (1881-1953), the French priest who had helped establish the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Reynolds used his column to challenge sectarianism, promote ecumenism and advocate peacemaking in the midst of the Troubles. Communion was published monthly until November 1988, when it became bi-weekly. The first column appeared in July 1987. It explained¹⁰⁹:

It is planned to publish 'Communion' in this paper as a monthly feature for a trial period. Its scope will be anything connected with the movement for Christian Unity. Let's have your reaction to the idea and send us any questions, any problems in this area which are occupying you. The content of the feature from here on will to a large degree be shaped by what you have to say.

In this first article, Reynolds also referred to 'those who write this column.' But the writing style is like Reynolds', and I have not found evidence that anyone else took responsibility for composing the stories. Yet Reynolds was determined that the column would be a collective enterprise. He published stories that people told him on the streets, or that they wrote in letters to the *Irish News*. In this way 'Communion' was a sort-of prototype of an online blog: each month featured a series of short posts, some of which included commentary from readers on the previous month's posts. It was this dialogic commentary that made Communion an outlet for many voices, not just Reynolds'. This approach reflected the ideals of Vatican II with its emphasis on the gifts of the laity and the importance of individual conscience; it also echoed the approach Reynolds had taken as editor of *Intercom*, which had

echoed O’Riordan and McGarry’s approach in the *Furrow*. The dialogue Reynolds hoped for had started by the second month (August 1987):

The invitation sent through this newspaper last month by some H-Block prisoners asking people to join them in a prayer vigil for peace brought many people together in prayer, and I am told some Catholics and Protestants. What does prayer for peace mean in our divided land? It surely means asking for an end to violence and war for these can have no place in the lives of people seeking to live in communion with one another in Jesus. ...

Reynolds returned to the theme of prayer many times. Occasionally Couturier’s ‘Prayer for Communion in Christ,’ which Gerry translated himself from French, was reprinted as part of the column. He also produced and distributed pocket-sized cards with the prayer on it. In the January 1988 column, he wrote that ‘thousands’ of these prayer cards had been distributed throughout Belfast over the ‘last four years.’ In November 1987 he drew attention to the prayer with a story called ‘In Memory of Mickey Power’:

The prayer printed in this *Communion* column was found in the prayer book of Belfast taxi man, Mickey Power, who was shot by loyalist assassins in front of his family on his way to Mass last August. His wife sent copies of the prayer to all who sympathized with her at the time of her bereavement. In memory of Mickey Power make it part of your own daily prayer from today. Write it out for yourself before you forget!

Reynolds also addressed the topic of so-called ‘mixed marriages’ between Catholics and Protestants, which have long been a source of tension and even sorrow for people in Ireland. In this column, he reframed mixed marriage as an occasion for joy rather than pain. It is about ‘A Granny’s Joy and Sadness,’ and was related to Reynolds by a stranger he met on a train (April 1988):

Though well into her 80s [his mother] reads the *Irish News* through every day. At their last meeting with her ... she was telling the whole family how she had read in that day's *Irish News* that the Catholic Church had 12 years ago come to recognize the Baptism celebrated in the Protestant Churches as a true sacrament. But that day was the first time she had ever heard about this. She asked had any of them heard about it. They were all Catholics and it was news to them all!

The old lady was very sorry she had not known about this epoch-making change of attitude a few years earlier when her grandson married a Presbyterian girl. ... Last month's feature brought joy to her heart. She feels closer than ever to her Presbyterian daughter-in-law. But she thinks it sad that she had to wait twelve years to have it explained to her that through the one baptism she and her daughter-in-law were sisters in Christ.

In April 1989, Reynolds was diagnosed with colon cancer. He recovered but required hospitalisation and convalescence. He also had been granted a sabbatical to study at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, which began in September that year. These factors contributed to Reynolds' decision to stop writing *Communion*. When he returned from Tantur, he resumed his behind-the-scenes work with Reid, which gathered intensity ahead of the ceasefires of 1994. Reynolds would not return to regular journalism again, although he continued to write occasionally for Catholic and secular media. As Reid almost never spoke with journalists, Reynolds became Clonard's unofficial media spokesperson on matters related to the Troubles. Given the nature of the secret talks which Reynolds knew about and at times assisted Reid with, speaking with the media was a more delicate balancing act than was appreciated at the time. Nevertheless, in the brief period during which he wrote

Communion, Reynolds communicated the ideals of Vatican II through his emphasis on ecumenism and his efforts to present the perspectives of laity, including women.

Reynolds was not alone in his journalistic efforts. Fr Des Wilson, a diocesan priest based in West Belfast, was a trusted clerical mediator for republican paramilitaries throughout the Troubles.¹¹⁰ Wilson also wrote prolifically about political and ecumenical issues over many years for a variety of media outlets. His *Andersonstown News* column ran for more than three decades. Passionist priest Fr Brian D'Arcy has written a devotional-style column for the *Sunday World* for more than 40 years, advocating greater participation of laity and women, and critiquing the Church for its response to clerical sexual abuse. He is also a popular radio presenter. It is beyond the scope of this article to fully analyse the effect of clerical journalism on Northern Ireland's shifting political and religious landscapes. But its impact was potentially very significant in shaping the hearts and minds of northern Catholics negotiating political and religious change; further research could be instructive in this regard.

Conclusion

The arch traditionalist McQuaid has commanded the attention of historians. But there was a significant group of clerical modernisers who used modern forms of mass communications to promote what can ultimately be judged as a modernisation of Irish Catholicism. While the clerical modernisers' contributions have not been fully appreciated, a few such as Dunn, Forristal, Lemass, and O'Riordan have been included in previous historical accounts. I am not aware of any prior studies that have emphasised the importance of the Redemptorists and Reynolds' contributions to the Church's cautious modernisation. During a crucial period, Reynolds was at the front and centre of the Catholic Church's efforts to utilise modern forms of mass communications. In my conversations with Reynolds, I got the impression that he

was downplaying the significance of his journalism, describing himself simply as an editor or someone who undertook clerical and administration tasks. But he was part of a communications revolution not just in the Catholic Church, but also in Ireland. Television was becoming widespread and religious publications and media coverage of religion were becoming more thoughtful and critical. He worked with some of the most significant and influential media figures of the day.

Reynolds wrote and talked about issues that were bound up with Ireland's modernisation process and, in a broader sense, he helped drive a modernising movement within the Church by developing its use of mass communications, creating a dialogue with priests and laity about issues that can be seen as part of a modern package. But unlike other Christian intellectuals and activists whose work is explored in this special issue, Reynolds was not preoccupied with modernisation and the secularisation that seemed to flow from it. Rather, he saw himself as helping to change the Catholic Church from within, in line with Vatican II and in response to the working of the Holy Spirit on his conscience.

Reynolds almost never used the terms modernisation and secularisation. His relative lack of attention to indicators of decline in the Catholic Church during his own lifetime was quite conspicuous. He rarely wrote about secularisation or decline in his personal journals – apart from prayers for more vocations to the Redemptorists. He did not speak with me about secularisation, except to say that he thought it was 'good' that media deference to the Church had withered away:

The role of the press is to be critical but above all, to be fair. I'm not upset by media criticism of the Catholic Church. The whole scandal of clerical child abuse, and the way it was handled – that hasn't done the leadership of the Church or the priests in the Church a great deal of good. We deserve to be criticised. It's much better that the

whole truth is out. We've nothing to fear from the truth. And the truth is the fact that we have been sinful and fallen short.

He only briefly acknowledged that more Irish people had 'moved away from worship.' He framed this decline as an opportunity to listen to what God had to say through the bible and 'the world we live in'; a response that reflects the emphases of Vatican II:

I suppose a lot of people have been reared up without much grounding in faith and have moved away from worship. ... Maybe that's the way it has to go, and we need to just keep grounding ourselves in reflecting on the Word of God, in the teaching of the Church, and also in the in the context of the world we live in. God is speaking to us through the refugees, through the asylum seekers. He's speaking to us too through the exposure of clerical child abuse. That's a call to penitence and renewal of life and we have nothing to fear from it.

Even before the media exposure of clerical sex scandals in the 1990s, Reynolds had a similar view, expressed in *Intercom* in 1970:¹¹¹

We have a right to expect balanced reporting and something more than an undergraduate approach to interviewing. But we should also expect that some reports must necessarily be disturbing. The people of the church do not always reflect Christ. We all need to have our faults pointed out. So reports which do us no credit in the short term have their place. They can highlight inadequacies in the church's work which have gone unnoticed. Such reporting may in the long run turn out to be a real service.

Yet it is still useful to analyse Reynolds' journalism as a response to trends that others, including other clerics, spoke and wrote about in terms of modernisation and secularisation. Reynolds' emphasis on 'truth' and the holy spirit helpfully reminds us that some clerics looked at these social processes through different, more hopeful, lenses.

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, Reynolds and other clerical modernisers' efforts to renew the Church through the media may seem to have had limited success. The Catholic Church's response to clerical sexual abuse, which has been marked by spectacularly poor communication, seems a case in point.¹¹² At the same time, the Irish Catholic Church has changed its approach to interacting with the media, becoming more open and framing its arguments in both secular and religious terms.¹¹³ Secularisation, as measured by sociological indicators like declines in religious attendance and practice, increased steadily and then sharply after the 1990s. The authoritarian Church of the traditionalists gave way to what Garvin called a *declericalised* Church, characterised by the 'collective humiliation of the Irish clergy'.¹¹⁴ But for Reynolds, this was an opportunity to encourage laity to take on more active roles in the Church; in his private diaries he even prayed that Irish Catholics would become more like their 'Presbyterian brothers and sisters', taking more personal responsibility for their faith and their Church. It is important to remember that in mid-twentieth century Ireland, the clerical modernisers' openness to change could not be taken for granted. But by relentlessly encouraging a self-critical, reflective and outward-looking faith, they helped to create and communicate what we might call a more modern Church. In this Church, declericalisation was not so much a problem as a gift – albeit one that has not yet been fully utilised. In recent years, some clerical journalists who have advocated modernising changes in the Church, like Redemptorist Fr Tony Flannery and Passionist Fr Brian D'Arcy, have been censured by the Vatican.¹¹⁵ This could be understood as Garvin's 'unintellectual tragedy' continuing apace. At the same time, Flannery and D'Arcy are portrayed sympathetically in Ireland's secular media and remain popular with many grassroots Catholics. Reynolds' vision of what the Catholic Church could become has not been realised, but it can be argued that he contributed to a cautious modernisation of the Church from within.

Notes

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- ¹ The Catholic Church is organised on an all-island basis, encompassing the Republic and Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland had a different experience of modernisation than the Republic, which will be acknowledged.
- ² Garvin, *Preventing the Future*.
- ³ Garvin, *Preventing the Future*, 211.
- ⁴ Ganiel, *Unity Pilgrim*.
- ⁵ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 250.
- ⁶ Ganiel, “Secularism, Ecumenism and Identity on the Island of Ireland”, 82.
- ⁷ Maher, *Tracing the Cultural Legacy*; Ganiel, “Secularism, Ecumenism and Identity on the Island of Ireland”; Ganiel, *Transforming Post-Catholic Ireland*.
- ⁸ Inglis, ‘Catholic Identity.’
- ⁹ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 38.
- ¹⁰ Lee, *Ireland: 1912-1985*, 395.
- ¹¹ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 247.
- ¹² Larkin, ‘The Devotional Revolution.’
- ¹³ Garvin, *Preventing the Future*.
- ¹⁴ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 250.
- ¹⁵ Garvin, *Preventing the Future*, 43
- ¹⁶ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 38.
- ¹⁷ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 36.
- ¹⁸ O’Toole, ‘The Roman Catholic Church,’ 11.
- ¹⁹ O’Toole, ‘The Roman Catholic Church,’ 11.
- ²⁰ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 52.
- ²¹ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 37.
- ²² Fr PJ Brophy, quoted in Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 123.
- ²³ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 123.
- ²⁴ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 127.
- ²⁵ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 39.
- ²⁶ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 40.
- ²⁷ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 39.
- ²⁸ Quoted in Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 130.
- ²⁹ Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic*, 602.
- ³⁰ Quoted in Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 76.
- ³¹ Quoted in Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 77.
- ³² Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 77.
- ³³ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 235.
- ³⁴ O’Toole, ‘The Roman Catholic Church,’ 11.
- ³⁵ Cooney, ‘Fr Austin Flannery.’
- ³⁶ Donnelly, ‘Sins of the Father,’ 330.
- ³⁷ Rafferty, ‘The Catholic Church in Ireland,’ 28.
- ³⁸ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 257.
- ³⁹ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 130.
- ⁴⁰ Quoted in Fuller, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950*, 112.
- ⁴¹ Fanning, *The Quest for Modern Ireland*, 1.
- ⁴² Fanning, *The Quest for Modern Ireland*, 6. *Studies* is still published.
- ⁴³ Fanning, *The Quest for Modern Ireland*, 8. *Christus Rex* ceased publication in 1970.
- ⁴⁴ Fanning, *The Quest for Modern Ireland*, 8.
- ⁴⁵ Fanning, *The Quest for Modern Ireland*, 112.
- ⁴⁶ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 108.
- ⁴⁷ Cooney, ‘Fr Austin Flannery.’
- ⁴⁸ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 86.
- ⁴⁹ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 86.
- ⁵⁰ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 87.
- ⁵¹ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 88.

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- ⁵² Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 108.
- ⁵³ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 108.
- ⁵⁴ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 129.
- ⁵⁵ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 130.
- ⁵⁶ Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic*, 650.
- ⁵⁷ O'Toole, 'The Roman Catholic Church,' 11.
- ⁵⁸ O'Toole, 'The Roman Catholic Church,' 11.
- ⁵⁹ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 134-135.
- ⁶⁰ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 134.
- ⁶¹ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 133.
- ⁶² Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, 584
- ⁶³ Not all Redemptorists are clerics. Some who join the Redemptorists are not ordained, and are referred to as brothers.
- ⁶⁴ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 16.
- ⁶⁵ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 26.
- ⁶⁶ Kelleher, 'Foreword,' 7.
- ⁶⁷ Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, 411.
- ⁶⁸ Kelleher, 'Foreword,' 7.
- ⁶⁹ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 230.
- ⁷⁰ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 230.
- ⁷¹ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 229.
- ⁷² McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 240.
- ⁷³ Flannery, *The Death of Religious Life*, chapter 4.
- ⁷⁴ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 242-243.
- ⁷⁵ Reynolds, 'My Fraternity Story.'
- ⁷⁶ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 242.
- ⁷⁷ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 248.
- ⁷⁸ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 244-249.
- ⁷⁹ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 248.
- ⁸⁰ Interview with author, 2018.
- ⁸¹ Ó Ríordáin, *Irish Catholics*, 5.
- ⁸² Reynolds, 'Recalling a Kerry Genius.'
- ⁸³ McConvery, *The Redemptorists in Ireland*, 219.
- ⁸⁴ Grant, *One Hundred Years*, 157-171.
- ⁸⁵ Mitchell, *Religion, Identity and Politics*; Brewer et al, *Religion, Civil Society and Peace*; The Author, XXX.
- ⁸⁶ Foster, *Luck and the Irish*, 40.
- ⁸⁷ Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, 585.
- ⁸⁸ Ganiel, *Unity Pilgrim*, 41-56.
- ⁸⁹ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*.
- ⁹⁰ *Reality* is still published.
- ⁹¹ Reynolds, 'What is the CCII all about?,' 3.
- ⁹² Dunn, 'Aftermath,' 1.
- ⁹³ 'Dear Father,' 2.
- ⁹⁴ 'Dear Father,' 2.
- ⁹⁵ 'Putting it straight,' 2.
- ⁹⁶ Quinlan, 'A Little Bit of Peace.'
- ⁹⁷ 'In Praise of Women,' 2.
- ⁹⁸ 'It All Seems Far Away,' 3.
- ⁹⁹ 'There's no Companion like a Lady Companion,' 4.
- ¹⁰⁰ 'Lay People would Understand,' 6.
- ¹⁰¹ 'It All Seems Far Away,' 4.
- ¹⁰² 'One of the "Real" Things in my Life,' 5.
- ¹⁰³ 'Feedback', 15-16.
- ¹⁰⁴ The Catholic Standard was a weekly published 1928-1978.
- ¹⁰⁵ This quotation is from a newspaper clipping Reynolds' sister Noreen Castle gave me, which had a handwritten note at the bottom saying it was 'probably' published in the *Limerick Leader*.
- ¹⁰⁶ Quinlan, 'A Little Bit of Peace.'
- ¹⁰⁷ Ganiel, *Unity Pilgrim*, 205-209; 237-243; Newell, *Captured by a Vision*; Wells, *Friendship Towards Peace*; Wells, *Hope and Reconciliation*; Robinson, *Embodied Peacebuilding*.

¹⁰⁸ Ganiel, *Unity Pilgrim*, 171-189; Brewer et al, *Religion, Civil Society and Peace*; McKeever, *One Man, One God*; O’Kane, ‘Talking to the Enemy’; Rafter, ‘Priests and Peace.’

¹⁰⁹ All quotations from *Communion* are referenced in the text by their month of publication.

¹¹⁰ Scull, *The Catholic Church and the Northern Ireland Troubles, 1968-1998*.

¹¹¹ ‘Never Venture, Never Win,’ 2.

¹¹² See note 88 above.

¹¹³ Conway, ‘Religious Public Discourses.’

¹¹⁴ Garvin, *Preventing the Future*, 212, 218.

¹¹⁵ Maignant, ‘Tony Flannery: A Witness in an Age of Witnesses.’

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