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The Island of the Saints and the Homeland of the Martyrs: Monsignor O'Riordan, Father Hagan and the Boundaries of the Irish Nation (1906-1916)

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Abstract:

The priests Michael O'Riordan and John Hagan led the Pontifical Irish College in Rome in the early decades of the twentieth century. At a crucial time for the birth of the Irish State, they promoted the demands of the Irish Church to the Vatican and participated actively in the debate on the political events of their nation. Thanks to the study of the writings they published in Italy from 1906 to 1916, we can determine what their ideas on the Irish homeland were, and why these ideas changed over the years. Their thoughts were not always the same, but the two Irishmen finally elaborated a more common national vision after the trauma of the Great War and a resounding episode as the 1916 Easter Rising.

Keywords: Easter Rising, Irish College Rome, John Hagan, Martyrdom, Michael O'Riordan

1. Introduction

Michael O'Riordan and John Hagan were two important exponents of that particular type of diaspora represented by the worldwide spread of Irish Catholic clergy. During the first decades of the twentieth century, they both held top positions in the Pontifical Irish College in Rome, one of the most emblematic institutions of the international projection of Gaelic Christianity. Pope Gregory XIII had established the seminary in 1628, and it had become a sort of agency of Irish episcopate from the years of Paul Cullen's rector-

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ate (1832-1849)[1]. Monsignor O'Riordan, from County Limerick, was born in 1857 and was educated at the Irish College, Pontificio Collegio Urbano de Propaganda Fide and Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome (Baylen 1974, 188, 22)[2]. After serving as a parish priest and working as a professor in his native region, he became rector of the Irish college in 1905. Pius X appointed him protonotary apostolic in 1907, and O'Riordan continued to lead the seminary until his death in 1919. Father Hagan was born in County Wicklow from a family of farmers in 1873 and studied in Rome at the Irish college. After spending the first years of priesthood in Ireland, he was sent back to the Italian capital, where he served as vice-rector of the seminary from 1904 to 1919 and as rector until his death in 1930[3].

Their pastoral mission took place in an extremely turbulent period, marked by the Great War and the fresh outbreak of the political and military conflict in Ireland. They faced exceptional circumstances and, bound by a deep bond to the vicissitudes of their motherland, worked constantly to influence the Roman Curia views about the Irish question. The priests established a solid personal relationship by pursuing this goal together. Their friendship was also animated by the common belief that the Holy See underestimated the tribute paid by the Irish people for the cause of the universal Church (Keogh 2008, 243). Moreover, they collaborated in the editing of *The Seven Hills Magazine*, a quarterly published from 1906 to 1908 as the journal of the Oliver Plunket Society, on which they both wrote articles on historiographical and religious subjects.

Although they were connected by a mutual esteem, there were also some differences between the two men. O'Riordan, a fine intellectual, was more prone to the study than to patriotic propaganda. The Rector was close to constitutional nationalism, but he decided to deal actively with political issues only when he arrived in the Italian capital to compensate for the lack of Irish representation inside the Vatican (Aan de Wiel 1999, 138). Hagan, a younger and more radical nationalist, was instead a passionate historian and a lively polemicist, who collaborated with many Italian and foreign newspapers and was the Roman correspondent of Dublin's magazine *The Catholic Bulletin* from 1911 to 1919[4]. Both O'Riordan and Hagan became real points of refer-

[1] Archbishop Paul Cullen was a key player in the history of the Irish Catholic Church. For an overall look of his life, see Bowen 1983.

[2] According to Maurizio Tagliaferri, however, O'Riordan was educated at the Almo Collegio Capranica (Tagliaferri 2004, 525).

[3] Father John Hagan was named *Monsignore* only in 1921 (Keogh 1995, 6).

[4] Father Hagan studied in detail some phases of the Irish history and paid particular attention to the period of the Counter-Reformation. He published his researches and the documents he found in the immense Roman archives on the Irish history journal *Archivium Hibernicum,* established in 1912.

ence for the episcopate of the Emerald Isle, but some scholars have portrayed the Vice Rector as the most pivotal character of the "Roman dimension […]" of Irish politics because of his activism (Keogh 1986, 4). This personal and political inhomogeneity reverberated also on the different nuances that the priests gave to their ideas of the Irish nation in the writings they published in Italy from 1906 to 1916. However, their national visions came closer and closer during those years, and they reached a more shared political thinking following the 1916 Easter Rising.

In recent times, some historical works have analysed the political relations between Ireland and Italy from the age of Italian Risorgimento to the beginning of Second World War[5]. From this perspective, the study of O'Riordan and Hagan's political evolution can offer an interesting point of view on the role played by the small but influential Irish diaspora in Italy in the struggle for Irish independence at the dawn of the 20th century. Indeed, only few Irish citizens resided in the Kingdom of Italy, but a significant number of Irish clergymen lived in Rome. Several Irish prelates resided in the headquarters of various religious orders and congregations, and they had contrasting views on the current political affairs (18-22). The leaders of the Irish College acted in this difficult context, facing the hostility of some factions of the Irish high clergy, but they succeeded in carrying out their goals with some success, and their action probably contributed to influencing Vatican decisions in dramatic moments, such as after the Easter Rising. The description of the development of O'Riordan and Hagan's national ideas can therefore illustrate the process that led them to take an important part in the events of Anglo-Irish conflict.

2. Before the tempest: Ireland, insula sanctorum

The two clerics debuted in the cultural panorama of Italian Catholicism by introducing the themes of the book *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland*, which O'Riordan composed in 1905 to respond to the famous volume *Ireland in the New Century*, written by the pioneer of the agrarian cooperative movement Horace Plunkett (Plunkett 1904; O'Riordan 1906 [1905]). In his work, the eminent liberal unionist described the causes of the endemic underdevelopment of the Irish countryside. Plunkett recognized the faults of the colonizers, but he attributed the heaviest responsibilities to the socially harmful effects of the Catholic doctrine, which was guilty of generating an apathetic and anti-industrial human type. The *Monsignore* replied to these accusations analysing the structural mechanism of backwardness and prais-

[5] See, for example, Phelan 2012; Carter 2015; Chini 2016; Crangle 2016; Moretti, Wood 2016.

ing the commercial initiative of the exiguous Catholic bourgeoisie and the participation of the clergy in the rural cooperatives.

O'Riordan's thesis brought into play the question of the relationship between the Church and the new Irish society. A germinal process of urbanization threatened in fact to weaken the cultural hegemony exercised by the Catholic nationalism since the ecclesiastical reform of the mid-19th century, the so-called devotional revolution, which had shaped a more aligned with Rome Irish Catholicism (Larkin 1972, 625; Larkin 1975, 1254-1258; Coldrey 1988, 53). O'Riordan's book was also an attempt to reorganize this type of nationalism, which considered the Catholic faith as the core of Irishness, in the context of the Emerald Isle entrance into modernity[6].

In an article published in April 1907 in the magazine *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali e Discipline Ausiliarie*, bound to the reformer Catholicism of Giuseppe Toniolo, the Rector explained the central theme of his volume: the contrast between the technocratic and pagan model of industrial development, built on the privileges of the few and on the sufferings of salaried workers, and the Catholic vision of the progress as the endogenous evolutionary motion of a society. If the Catholic progress had originated the great social achievements of humanity as "the doctrine of the equality of men, the sanctity of marriage, the rights of women, the spirit of sacrifice, the duty and dignity of work [...]", the pagan one was exemplified by the imperialist expansion of the Protestant England in America, India and Oceania, characterized by "a systematic oppression that constitutes one of the darkest pages in human history" (O'Riordan 1907, 502, 506). The article did not deal directly with Ireland, but the message was clear: to emancipate themselves from the colonial dependency, the Irish people would have to build their own modernity, which should have been alternative to the invaders' one and consistent with the teachings of the social doctrine of the Church.

Hagan had already reviewed *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland* on the monthly *Rivista Storico-Critica delle Scienze Teologiche* about a year before. However, compared to his superior, the Vice Rector seemed moved by a more urgent need to attest to the progressive nature of Catholic thought. In his reflections, O'Riordan stated that the Church could not be responsible for the material development level achieved by a civilization because its teaching was primarily spiritual. Hagan, conversely, observed that, if the irreconcilability between the general improvement of living conditions and the

[6] Monsignor O'Riordan's correspondence is now inaccessible. However, his particular interest in the figure of former Rector Paul Cullen, who become the apostolic delegate of the Holy See in Ireland and drove the devotional revolution, is also evident from Hagan's epistolary, in which there were also several references to the possibility that O'Riordan would undertake the writing of a biography of the important personality. P.J. Walsh to John Hagan, 23 September 1912; Michael O'Riordan to John Hagan, 7 August 1913.

Catholic faith had been proven, the human beings could have understandably concluded: "if there is disharmony, so much worse for the Catholicism" (Hagan 1906, 34). He also underlined the importance of the book for the Irish nation, which Plunkett's arrogance had vilified both in the homeland and in the diaspora (35).

The magazine that published the review was one of the laboratories of the Italian modernism, and it revolved around the priest Ernesto Buonaiuti, historian of Christianity and leading man of the ecclesial renewal movement in Rome, who worked for some years as a repeater of philosophy and theology at the Irish College, where he met and became friend with Hagan. Some historians have suggested the hypothesis of a full participation of the Irishman to the so-called radical Roman group, the circle headed by Buonaiuti, who in those years proposed "to instil a religious and Christian soul in socialism […]" (Buonaiuti 2008 [1945], 98), but the rigorous tones of *The Seven Hills Magazine* and the doctrinal orthodoxy that emerges from Hagan's epistolary do not seem to confirm this eventuality[7]. There was, however, an undoubted intellectual exchange between the cultural atmosphere of the Irish College and the Roman modernism. *The Seven Hills Magazine* published the texts of a series of lectures held in the College by Buonaiuti, who, in turn, acclaimed the brightness and the accuracy of the Oliver Plunket Society's quarterly on his periodical (Buonaiuti 1906a; 1906b; 1906c; 1907).

Hagan, in all probability, had never been a modernist, but he was convinced that the Church should support and influence the process of social change taking place in his homeland. In May 1909, he wrote an article for the *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali e Discipline Ausiliarie* about the technical analysis of the Irish agricultural question and the land reform laws approved by the British government from 1870 to 1909, which had gradually led to the dismantling of the latifundium. The Vice Rector praised this change as "one of the greatest social reforms that the modern legislation reminds […]", interpreting it as the result of the incessant struggle of Catholic peasants against colonial landlordism, the cornerstone of the British dominion in Ireland (Hagan 1909, 17). The conflicting methods of rural organizations were even fully justified because, faced with evictions and misery, "the right to existence took fatally the upper hand by now" (8). The participation of the clergy in the agrarian mobilisations had been a luminous page, which the conservatives had slandered accusing the priests of being "troublemakers of the plebs […]" (11). Hagan expounded to the Italian Catholics the extraordinary nature of the Irish democratic movement, which had been able to combine political reformism with Catholic affiliation, and thus he con-

[7] Several studies have described Hagan as a possible member of the radical Roman group. See, for example, Bedeschi 1972, 10-13; Fiorani 1990, 152.

cluded: "Glory to the nation which has succeeded in imposing the definitive disarmament on its economic oppressors through tenacious and heroic efforts" (*ibidem*).

Hagan's prose was inspired by the desire that in the new political phase the Irish priests would not give up the role of people's pastors they had assumed in the past. He also hoped that the new nationalism, which had become less conditioned by the confrontation with the great land ownership of the absentee Protestant nobility, turning into a mainly urban political phenomenon, did not distance itself from the Church of Rome. This aspiration placed him in the wake of the authoritative William J. Walsh, archbishop of Dublin from 1885 to 1921, who led that part of the Irish episcopate that was in disagreement with the line taken by the Vatican since Pope Leo XIII condemned the Plan of Campaign in 1888[8]. Walsh believed that the papal disapproval of the peasant resistance had damaged the Church's hold within the nationalist movement, so he consecrated his life to prevent the possibility of a divorce between the patriotism and the faith, which for him would have endangered the very foundations of the Irish national identity (Keogh 1986, 10). Hagan, who was ordained priest in the diocese of Dublin, grew up under the Archbishop's influence and entertained a close correspondence from Rome with him and with his secretaries Father Michael Cullen and Father P.J. Walsh, with whom he also debated over political current affairs. Some scholars have qualified the unprecedented capacity of a reactionary clergy to orientate a modern nationalist mobilization as the Irish exception (Green 1998, 124), but this was not the Vice Rector and Walsh's case. They were united instead by the conviction that the New Ireland should preserve the marriage between the transformative tension and the Catholic tradition to maintain its national specificity. The militant attitude of the younger priest actually constituted a radicalization of the project of social regeneration of Catholic nationalism promoted by the Archbishop (Keogh 1986, 14).

In August 1909, shortly after Hagan's article on the agrarian reform, the *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali e Discipline Ausiliarie* published the text of a speech, regarding the history of the campaign for the repeal of the Penal Laws, delivered by Monsignor O'Riordan on 1 July 1909 during a conference of the Pontifical Academy of Catholic Religion[9]. The Rector retraced the steps of a confessional movement that had united the requests of the Catholics of Great Britain and Ireland, but he did not avoid to point

[8] Pope Leo XIII condemned the boycott against landlords and the rent strikes organized by the nationalist movement through a Papal Rescript (20 April 1888) and the Encyclical *Saepe Nos* (24 June 1888), addressed to the Irish bishops (Larkin 1978).

[9] O'Riordan republished the speech text as a pamphlet in 1909 and in an extended edition in 1910 (O'Riordan 1909b; 1910).

out the double oppression, both national and religious, suffered by the Irish, which had been harder than the one Romans had inflicted on the first Christians because "the law allowed to the primitive Christians of Rome to bury their dead publicly and freely in the cemeteries of their property and with their rites; this right, on the contrary, the law denied to Irish Catholics until recently; until the nineteenth century" (O'Riordan 1909a, 478). O'Riordan observed that the faithful of the Church of Rome were a small minority in England, made up largely of immigrants, while on the Emerald Isle "the Catholics were the nation" (478-479). The cause of the Catholic Church coincided therefore with the Irish one; faith was the beating heart of the Irish community and precisely the widespread mobilization for Catholic emancipation had allowed the creation of a national counter-power (490). The Protestant fanaticism that also harassed the English Catholics could be in fact contained by one power only, "and this power is constituted by the supportive Irish people, organized to demand justice" (496).

The distinction between the national identities of the Catholics of the two islands was more clearly proclaimed in a study published by Hagan in the journal of Buonaiuti in February 1910. The article claimed the honorary title of *insula sanctorum* for Ireland rather than for England, stating that the Europeans had unduly confused the Irish with the British Catholics by virtue of the common condition of subordination experienced after the Penal Laws (Hagan 1910a, 108-109)[10]. Indeed, O'Riordan believed that the interests of English Catholics coincided with those of the Irish because only a coordinated action would have enforced the rights of the Church, and that the former ones did not recognize this reality because they were prisoners of their national egoism. Hagan instead seemed keener on accepting the distinction between the respective political demands as a fact, regardless of religious affinity. The Vice Rector based his analysis on a considerable amount of documents, especially from the Middle Ages, which attested he Irish ownership of the title of *insula sanctorum*, and he included the British usurpation of Gaelic primacy in the "process of denigration and persecution to which Ireland has been repeatedly subjected from the day when, forced to live with the neighbouring and larger island, it had become the Cinderella of the United Kingdom" (101). Therefore, Hagan claimed the genetically Christian nature of the Irish nation, which had generated "a true dynasty of saints and thinkers [...]" and had been a fundamental propulsive centre of medieval monasticism (98, 102-103).

The declared purpose of Hagan was to promote in the eyes of the Church the "high merits that the old green island has gained in front of the Christian

[10] Hagan republished an extended edition of the article as a pamphlet soon after (Hagan 1910b).

civilization [...]" (109), but he himself was struck by the repressive measure established by the ecclesiastical institution a few months later. In 1909, in fact, the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office had brought a sensational process against the radical Roman group, based on the delation of one of its former members and on a massive use of spy methods[11]. The cardinals interrogated Hagan as companion of Buonaiuti on 20 December 1909, but he denied the most serious accusations against the modernist and did not reveal other names (Bedeschi 1978, 32). The loyalty shown by the Vice Rector to his friend was punished by a disciplinary action dated July 6 1910, which decreed the removal of Hagan from the Irish College. This decision, however, had no practical effects: he was not dismissed, and Buonaiuti continued to work at the seminar (41). The modernist himself recognized his debt to the two Irish clerics in his autobiography, reminding that they had remained the only ones to guarantee him an income after the trial (Buonaiuti 2008 [1945], 137).

3. The Home Rule period: the search for the Irish civilization

In the summer of 1911, Ernesto Buonaiuti travelled to Ireland, where he sojourned at some acquaintances of the Vice Rector[12]. Back to Italy, the modernist published an account of this experience in the journal *Nuova Antologia*, describing the latent Anglo-Irish conflict as the confrontation between two distinct civilizations more than between two merely confessional, linguistic or cultural communities (Buonaiuti 1911, 463)[13]. The suggestion of Buonaiuti echoed some of the themes already contained in Hagan's writings, but it almost seemed to prefigure the thesis that Hagan clearly expounded in an article on the Home Rule published by the *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali e Discipline Ausiliarie* in January 1913[14].

The piece was purely political and reflected the new atmosphere that was produced on the Emerald Isle due to both the harsh debate on the draft law about self-government, presented by the liberal government of H.H. Asquith in April 1912, and the incipient proliferation of militias of various political beliefs, starting from the founding of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in the

[11] For a detailed description of the episode, see Bedeschi 1986 [1972].

[12] Ernesto Buonaiuti to John Hagan, 22 July 1911; Ernesto Buonaiuti to John Hagan, 11 August 1911.

[13] The article was an anticipation of a wider reportage that Buonaiuti and the modernist priest Nicola Turchi, his travelling companion, published in 1914 (Buonaiuti, Turchi 1914). The Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office condemned the book, but the newly elected Pope Benedict XV mitigated the provision and ordered to buy all copies of the volume to remove it from distribution (Bedeschi 1970, 51-52; Verucci 2010, 61-68).

[14] Hagan republished the article as a pamphlet in a first version and then in an extended edition (Hagan 1913b; 1913c).

early days of 1913. Reconstructing the various phases of the colonial domination, Hagan denounced the agrarian question as a "real offense to humanity [...]" (Hagan 1913a, 36) and attacked the cowardliness of the British government, which over the centuries had approved reforms to alleviate the suffering of the Irish people only when it had been driven by the threats of civil war or by the Fenian violence (34, 39-40). The author qualified the Home Rule as a "vast and silent revolution" (53) and explicitly accused the residual forces that opposed the approval of the reform. Hagan criticized both the Ulster Protestants who were afraid of losing their privileges and the conservative Catholics who denounced the disengagement from England as a risk for the Church because they feared the political radicalization that would have caused by the legislative autonomy (58-60).

Polemicizing with the detractors of the Home Rule, the Vice Rector affirmed above all the irreducible otherness of the Irish nation from the cultural criteria imposed by the British Empire, and thus he evoked the image of a peculiar Irish civilization, weakened but still indomitable, whose roots date back to the pre-colonial Gaelic society:

> Located on the borders of Europe, outside the whirlwind of continental events, Ireland had found its peaceful ways, happy with its laws of the Brehons and its clan system, its culture and schools, and its intense Christian life within and his zealous effort to proselytize abroad; and these paths were followed by her until her sons had to change the pen with the sword; the crosier with the lance [...]. (19)

In Hagan's vision, therefore, various elements such as the Brehon laws, the clan social system, the early evangelization and the autochthonous monasticism contributed to a coherent attempt to redefine the profound soul of the Irish nation. This original socio-cultural unity, both Gaelic and Christian, both peaceful and virile, had been violently shattered by the colonization, which had introduced the seed of underdevelopment into the healthy body of the nation:

> However, instead of welcoming and adopting the best of Irish habits, the Irish land system and the singularly developed system of the Irish law, to which the people lent unlimited respect and to which he was deeply attached, the English committed the fatal error to order the new estates on the feudal type [...]. (19-20)

The forced and artificial importation of feudal property had dissolved the previous system of land management on a community and family basis, excluding the Irish farmers from the same human community and generating a situation of intolerable social inequality:

> The formation of two classes was deliberately required, at the antipodes of each other. On the one hand, the imported ones and their descendants, English or

Scottish, Protestant, the favourite class, forming the "Pale" or English colony, the party of predominance, with all the land, all the welfare, all the political authority in their hands. On the other hand, the Catholics, the descendants of the Irish and the Anglo-Irish, now confused together in the saddest persecution and misery, reduced to the condition of miserable servants, simple labourers on their ancient land [...]. (21)

The Irish national struggle therefore represented the rescue of the Catholic natives, the legitimate depositaries of the Gaelic cultural heritage. In the expanded version of the article, republished as a pamphlet, Hagan deplored the House of Lords as the main obstacle to the full satisfaction of the demands of this patriotic and popular movement, and he openly accused its members of being sworn enemies of progress in general, pointing out that they had opposed the granting of the political rights to the Jews as the approval of the laws for the protection of the miners; the abolition of the death penalty for petty thefts as well as the proclamation of the Catholic emancipation (Hagan 1913c, 61-65). Thus, the Vice Rector called for the Home Rule in the name of national specificity, but he inserted the Irish request into a wider process of social transformation. The scenario that was outlined by Hagan could not have been framed in the traditional Catholic nationalism because the reference to the primitive Gaelic society confuted the idea that Catholicism was the only essential requirement of the Irishness and because he characterized the claim of a greater sovereignty in a markedly progressive sense.

The revaluation of the pre-colonial legacy echoed some of the typical motifs of the cultural season of the Gaelic Revival, which had heavily conditioned the intellectual climate of the island from the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Revival had promoted the renaissance of the Irish language and traditions in order to revive a national spirit that was alternative to the Anglo-Saxon one, considered as predatory and utilitarian. Even if the Catholic hierarchy had initially called Gaelic revival to be a threat to the hegemony of the Church because of its appeal to a past that was not necessarily Christian, a certain ideal interpenetration had finally implemented between the cultural movement and the Catholic nationalism (McCaffrey 1989, 15; Mathews 2003, 46). Disagreements continued between the episcopate and some intellectuals, but a part of the clergy interpreted the rediscovery of the Gaelic heritage as an opportunity for a moral regeneration of society, as well as an instrument to rebuild an uncontaminated Ireland, purified by the drosses of the colonialism and of the Protestant Reformation (Harris 2001, 344-347). The political usage of this cultural trend was not uniform and fluctuated between the proposal of an exclusivist and reactionary agenda and a certain fascination for maximalist solutions.

Hagan did not personally participated in the associations born during the Revival years, but his analysis of homeland history seems to be also linked to that more or less radical social reformism line that was nourished by the myth

of Gaelic Ireland. He thus distanced himself from the moderatism that innervated the writings of Monsignor O'Riordan, who was less inclined to embrace a nationalism that was not eminently Catholic. In the positions that the Rector assumed during the agitations for the Home Rule, however, the germs of a new political perspective were rising. In April 1912, O'Riordan had indirectly faced the subject of the self-government by publishing a memorandum on the question of the independence of Catholic schools from the interference by the British state, which was a historic claim of the Irish Church. Archbishop Paul Cullen had inaugurated the campaign for the abolition of state control over the Catholic education in Ireland in the middle of the 19th century, and it had achieved a decisive success with the establishment of the National University in 1908 (Larkin 1976 [1975], 1259-1267). The constitutional nationalists of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) had always advocated the cause of Catholic schools in the name of the consolidated clergy-nationalist alliance, but now they seemed oriented to support the liberal government in a draft law concerning the elementary schools in England that interfered also with the methods of teaching religion.

In his booklet, O'Riordan asserted that the behaviour of constitutional nationalists protected the self-determination of the English Catholic schools in the best possible way, and he ensured that Irish representatives would continue to support their British coreligionists. Accordingly, he defended the pragmatic conduct of the IPP from the charges put forward by the English Catholics elders, which accused the party of treason because it tried to assure the liberal support for the approval of the Home Rule. The Rector praised the Irish deputies as "the only bulwark of Catholic schools in England", but he also stated that they had no obligations towards English Catholics and that Ireland had elected them to win legislative autonomy (O'Riordan 1912, 10). O'Riordan made therefore explicit the existence of a gap between the interests of the Catholics of the two islands more clearly than in his previous writings, identifying precisely in the IPP led by John Redmond the champion of the national demands of the Irish people.

4. Between the War and the Rising: the redefinition of the boundaries of the Irish nation

The reflections of Monsignor O'Riordan and Father Hagan about the Irish nation underwent further development due to the militarization of the Irish political life and the advent of the Great War. The conflict generated by the debate on the self-government project actually became increasingly harder, and other militias were born besides UVF, such as the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army. Both the constitutional nationalists and the republicans were part of the Volunteers, while the socialist unionists founded

the Citizen Army during the Dublin Lockout, the long and dramatic strike organized by the transport workers in 1913.

The House of Commons finally approved the Home Rule in May 1914, but the King hesitated to sign it. George V decided to ratify the reform only after the war began, in September 1914, but he postponed its application and the final resolution of the Ulster issue until the end of hostilities. John Redmond believed that supporting the British war effort was necessary to obtain the effective granting of the Home Rule, so he urged the Irish nationalists to enlist themselves as volunteers in a crusade for the liberation of the small nations, including Ireland. The majority of the Irish Catholic clergy also adhered to the IPP positions and actively participated in the recruitment and in the war propaganda, contributing to the significant successes achieved by the enlistment campaign in the years 1914 and 1915 (Aan de Wiel 2016, 162-163).

The impending of the world conflict deeply outraged O'Riordan, who in a letter to Hagan dated 2 August 1914 already defined the war as "brutal and beastly"[15]. This repulsion for the massacre that was beginning to take shape in Europe brought the Rector closer to those sectors of the Irish episcopate that disapproved of the interventionist turning point of constitutional nationalism, represented for instance by the Archbishop of Dublin William J. Walsh, who attempted in his diocese to counteract the recruitment within the Catholic community (164). O'Riordan collaborated above all with his fellow countryman the Bishop of Limerick Edward Thomas O'Dwyer, an elderly prelate, who was resistant to any patriotic mobilization that undermined the primacy of the obedience to the Holy See.

O'Dwyer had violently argued with Irish nationalists in the past, following the papal condemnation of the Plan of Campaign. They even nicknamed him the "Landlord Bishop" because he had continued to defend the actions of Pope Leo XIII even in that painful break (Macaulay 2008, 203). In the face of the World War and the neutralism of Pope Benedict XV, however, the ultramontane O'Dwyer was the bishop who more vehemently broke with the IPP, becoming a standard-bearer of a position of absolute opposition to the conflict, which was otherwise supported only by minorities like the maximalist republicans and the revolutionary socialists. Monsignor O'Riordan decided to sustain O'Dwyer's initiatives not only for the shared rejection of the war but also because he feared that Great Britain, which appointed the Catholic nobleman Sir Henry Howard as special envoy to the Vatican in November 1914, could exploit the period of fighting to re-establish official relations with the Holy See, further marginalizing the weight of the Irish Church in Rome (Aan de Wiel 1999, 138-139).

[15] Michael O'Riordan to John Hagan, 2 August 1914.

The Rector therefore systematically translated into Italian the public interventions in which O'Dwyer claimed his opposition to the Irish participation in the war in the name of the neutralist orientation of the papacy, distributing them to the Pontiff and to the cardinals of the Roman Curia. Benedict XV and a part of the high clergy of Italy showed their appreciation for the ideas expressed by the Bishop of Limerick, and the Pope significantly welcomed the translation of the appeal that O'Dwyer made to Redmond to recommend him to align with the positions of the Vatican in August 1915 (143). The controversy with Redmond had moreover increased the popularity of the Bishop in Ireland, where the enthusiasm for the war declined in the meantime, while the movements that contested the IPP collaboration with the British government were strengthening. This was the case of the Irish Volunteers' republican faction, which had separated itself from the constitutional majority, maintaining its original name.

In January 1916, O'Riordan also published a pamphlet written by O'Dwyer about a month earlier, resuming the appeal for peace that Benedict XV had uttered in the apostolic exhortation of July 28, 1915. In the libellous, the Bishop pointed his finger at the governments of the belligerent states, deploring the ongoing conflict as "a war to the last drop of blood for the dominion of the world" and addressing the Catholics of all countries to "do everything in their power to put an end to this creepy slaughter, scourge of our civilization, scandal of our religion" (O'Dwyer 1916, 6, 18). O'Riordan also wrote a few notes to the text in which he endorsed O'Dwyer's severe judgment on the behaviour of the nationalist leadership, arguing that "nothing less than the absolute subjection of Mr. Redmond to the will of the government will succeed in satisfying the government itself" (8).

In addition to promoting O'Dwyer's pacifist intransigence in the Vatican circles, the Rector also pleaded the right of the Irish Church to appoint autonomously the Catholic chaplains for the regiments enlisted on the Emerald Isle. This prerogative was a traditional privilege of the archbishop of Westminster; therefore, the claim sponsored by O'Riordan also assumed the connotations of a statement of national independence. The Rector pursued his goal tenaciously, and he printed a detailed memorial on the topic in 1916. In the writing, he criticized the distribution of the chaplains established by the English episcopate and accused the British military authorities of penalizing the Catholic troops[16]. In his work of mediation with the Vatican, O'Riordan entertained a dense correspondence not only with the Irish bishops but also with several chaplains scattered on the battlefields, whose stories about the material and spiritual conditions of the trenches fighters al-

[16] I could not find the O'Riordan's memorial (O'Riordan 1916a), but P.A. Boyle has described its contents in detail (Boyle 2008).

lowed him to delve into the tragic reality of war (Boyle 2008, 231). Indeed, the Rector was a convinced follower of the gradualist strategy of the constitutional nationalism before the war conflagration, but now he was experiencing a progressive political radicalization by virtue of some elements, such as the close collaboration with the militant neutralist O'Dwyer, the efforts to ensure spiritual assistance to the soldiers and the fear that the conscription introduced in Great Britain in January 1916 could also be extended to Ireland. His new vision, in turn, had repercussions on his interpretation of the idea of Irish nation.

In the homily given on the 1916 St. Patrick's Day, later published as a pamphlet, O'Riordan used the example of the Irish patron saint, who had returned to the land where he had been a slave in the mad enterprise of bringing the gospel there, to illustrate the doctrine of the death and the resurrection of Christ but also his personal concept of the Irishness. According to the Rector, the human history should have been interpreted as an eternal conflict between the brutality of the world power, exemplified by the arrogance of the transient earthly empires, and the apparent weakness inherent in the oxymoronic symbol of the cross, emblem of the martyrdom but also of the final triumph of eternal life on death. The history of Ireland, in turn, had to be understood in the light of the same mechanism: the Emerald Isle had preserved the purity of the Christian message taken from St. Patrick in spite of centuries of persecution, "but the price paid to save it was the martyrdom of a nation" (O'Riordan 1916b, 17). The Irish people had remained faithful in the darkest moments of the oppression not by virtue of the liturgy's splendour or of the study of the dogmas; "it must have been something else and greater. It was the power of St. Patrick's prayers; the merit of martyrdom of their fathers […]" (20). Experiencing the cross on his own skin, the Irish nation had become "the centre of a supernatural empire bound together in the unity of faith, hope and love" (26). Even in the terrible context of the World War, which seemed to proclaim the definitive defeat of the Christian heritage and Ireland, the Emerald Isle would therefore have uplifted thanks to its own prolonged passion.

By referring to the Christian conception of martyrdom, thus, O'Riordan identified not just the confessional belonging but also the willingness to make sacrifices in the name of a superior good as the essence of the Irishness, and he led back the second characteristic to the primordial preaching of St. Patrick. In the Rector's speech, the evocation of the martyrdom and the rebirth of the Catholic Ireland transcended indeed the merely spiritual dimension, and it became the cipher used to analyse the various phases of the Irish political history. Father John Hagan also abhorred the scenario outlined by the World War, and he despised the IPP's adherence to the war mobilization as much as Monsignor O'Riordan, but perhaps his dissent was even more directly dependent on a political evaluation. He in fact firmly believed that the

fervour employed by Redmond in favour of the enlistment campaign had now compromised the independence of the constitutional nationalism from Great Britain (Keogh 2007, 255).

Moreover, the Vice Rector shared with his superior the proclivity to supporting and encouraging those members of the Irish clergy who refused to adapt to the IPP collaboration policy with the British. For example, as evidenced by his correspondence, Hagan encouraged the republican priest Michael O'Flanagan in the early months of 1916, trying to advise him in what way he could avoid a provision of ecclesiastical suspension, of which O'Flanagan was threatened because he had expressed himself against the war during a public rally in Cork[17]. The radical curate had already been removed for a similar reason from his previous parish of Cliffoney, County Sligo, where he had been the protagonist of a tumultuous dispute with his own bishop, which had culminated with a prolonged picketing of the church by the parishioners who had claimed his return. O'Flanagan had been marginalized in his homeland because of his militancy, but he found an important support in Rome exactly in the Vice Rector, with whom he shared the opinion that the political credibility of Redmond was definitively decayed[18].

The relationship between the two priests thus represented a testimony of Hagan's hostility to the world conflict and of his ambition for a national liberation that was deeper than that of constitutional nationalism. If the war had changed the O'Riordan's approach to politics, in the Vice Rector's case it did nothing but reinforce his patriotism and his vision of the Irish nation, in which the need for a progressive social transformation joined the reaffirmation of the Catholic orthodoxy. Hagan reiterated the points of his national idea in a letter he sent in April 1916 to the monthly *La Scuola Cattolica*, which was linked to the theological faculty of the Milan seminary, to dispute some of the statistics contained in an article by the mathematician Rodolfo Bettazzi, in which Ireland was included among the less prolific countries due to the spread of neo-Malthusian practices. The Vice Rector wanted to demonstrate the foreignness of the Irish people to the methods for birth control, but he also denounced the living conditions of popular masses, forced to emigrate, and he emphasized the intrinsic adhesion of the islander people to the Catholic ethics even in the intimate and daily behaviours (Hagan 1916, 534-538).

When the magazine published the short priest's piece, on May 1, 1916, the tragic and unexpected event that brought the Irish question to the international limelight, the Easter Rising, had been over for a few days. The revolt was to begin on Easter Sunday, but the failure of the landing of the weapons sent by Germany and the opposition of Eoin MacNeill, who was

[17] Fragment letter from John Hagan to Michael O'Flanagan, 25 January 1916.
[18] Michael O'Flanagan to John Hagan, 25 January 1916.

the president of the Irish Volunteers, caused its postponement, compromising its outcome. In the end, on April 24, 1916, on Easter Monday, about 1,500 militants occupied the neuralgic centres of Dublin and few other places in the country, proclaiming the Irish Republic. The restricted team of extremist republicans and revolutionary socialists succeeded to resist less than a week, but the unfortunate insurrectional attempt received a large echo in Europe because it unveiled the contradictions of the Allied democratic rhetoric, revealing the threat of possible internal enemies that could have joined forces with the hostiles powers to undermine the war effort of the belligerent countries. The revolt was certainly a political hazard, and it did not receive the consent of the great majority of the citizens of Dublin, who powerless witnessed the destruction of their city. However, the excesses carried out by the British troops during the repression, the subsequent mass arrests and the summary executions of the leaders early aroused a widespread feeling of indignation.

Eminent exponents of the Irish Church hierarchy, such as Archbishop Walsh, refused to publicly condemn the insurrection, while Bishop O'Dwyer furiously contested the Military Governor, General Sir John G. Maxwell, who had invited him to bring back some priests, who were sympathetic with the rebels, to the obedience (Aan de Wiel 2016, 177-178). On the other hand, the incident caused bewilderment within the states of the Allied Powers. Almost all the Italian liberal and interventionist forces deplored the Easter Rising as a plot organized by the German General Staff with the complicity of the defeatist socialists and the most obscurantist clergy[19]. The majority of the Italian Catholic press did not make an exception. In order to defend the Church from the accusation of connivance, it stated that the rebels were members of anti-clerical, if not Protestant, secret societies, unrelated to Catholic nationalists who were demonstrating their loyalty to the Entente in the trenches[20]. Pro-British hierarchs, such as English Cardinal Francis Aidan Gasquet, were also active in Rome, and they intended to exploit the sensational episode to discredit the Irish republicanism in front of the Vatican. Even a significant part of the Irish community residing in the Italian capital, bounded to the constitutional nationalism, showed their disapproval of the uprising through a hard telegram, which was also signed by the Superior of the Irish Christian Brothers Michael Costen (Keogh 1986, 19-22).

[19] Both the liberal and the nationalist press denounced the German planning of the revolt. See, for example, Anonimo, "Dalla rivolta di Dublino alla Coscrizione" (1916a), *L'Idea Nazionale*, 27 April; Emanuel Guglielmo (1916), "La rivolta dei feniani a Dublino progettata con la complicità tedesca", *Corriere della Sera*, 27 April; Prati Marcello (1916), "Le giornate di Dublino", *La Stampa*, 30 April; Crespi Angelo (1916), "I moti d'Irlanda furon preparati a Berlino!", *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 6 May.

[20] See, for example, Anonimo (1916b), "I protestanti irlandesi e il moto dei feniani", *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 28 April; Anonimo (1916d), "La setta dei feniani", *Corriere d'Italia*, 1 May.

The Papal Count George Noble Plunkett, whom the republican leaders had sent to Rome to confer with Benedict XV in order to avoid a clear condemnation of the revolt and to obtain the apostolic blessing for the rebels, had revealed the subversive plan to O'Riordan and Hagan in mid-April (Keogh 2007, 272)[21]. After the failure of the insurrection, the rulers of the Irish College decided to undertake an ambitious counter-information attempt because they feared that the almost unanimous condemnation of the event and the clerical anti-republicanism could influence the papal opinion on the Irish question. Therefore, they clandestinely and anonymously published a large brochure, which was titled *La Recente Insurrezione in Irlanda*, in September 1916, proposing a radically different version of the facts[22]. The booklet, which was printed in 500 copies and was distributed to the Pope, to the cardinals of the Roman Curia and to various personalities of the Irish clergy, was attributed to Monsignor O'Riordan only, but in reality Father Hagan participated in its drafting, too (301)[23].

The two priests wanted to prove that the Easter Rising was not a Teutonic conspiracy, but "the silly attempt of a small nucleus of impulsive youngsters [...]", which could have been understood in the light of the tragic consequences of the war (Anonimo [Hagan, O'Riordan] 1916, 19). The ephemeral revolt was the result of the profound social contradictions generated by the English refusal to immediately implement the Home Rule reform, which revealed itself as a "simple trap to enlist the Irish" (10). The authors denounced that British Empire was consolidating its world hegemony thanks to the blood of the soldiers recruited on the Emerald Isle, used as cannon fodder in the desperate battle of Gallipoli (13), or sent to the front after being conscripted through deception as happened to some emigrants who had gone as seasonal workers to England (16-17). O'Riordan and Hagan quoted the words of Bishop O'Dwyer, who had denounced the attempted lynching of a group of Irish emigrants carried out by some supporters of the war in Liverpool. Indeed, he had publicly stated that the Irish peasants had every right not to participate in the World War because "they would rather prefer being left in peace to cultivate the potato fields in Connemara" (14). The Irish College clerics believed that the inopportune insurrection was however animated by the vain hope of avoiding further suffering to the people. It could be consid-

[21] According to a later testimony of Plunkett himself, the Pope actually granted his blessing, while he refused to approve the revolt (Keogh 2007, 266-267; Aan de Wiel 2016, 173).

[22] The pamphlet immediately became known as the red book because its cover colour (Aan de Wiel 1999, 144).

[23] The Prior General of the Carmelite Order P.A. Magennis revealed the Vice Rector's role in the writing of the pamphlet when he published the Hagan's obituary on the *Catholic Bulletin* (1930, 301).

ered, on the contrary, a sort of preventive reaction against the government plan to annihilate the political forces that did not want to support the war effort (19). The rebels had been of course reckless, but their intentions were pure: "No one can call into question their abnegation in a mission that implied undoubtedly the sacrifice of their lives [...]" (19-20).

In his previous reflections on his homeland history, O'Riordan had identified the propensity to give life for the common good as the hidden force that allowed the Irish nation to endure through the persecutions. The mysticism of the martyrdom was also present in the political culture of some rebel leaders, such as the poet and President of the self-proclaimed Irish Republic Patrick Pearse, who had explicitly suggested a temerarious analogy in his writings: the sacrifice of the patriots would have uplifted Ireland from the colonial yoke as well as the passion of Christ had redeemed the humanity (Murphy 1991, 48). When the Rector had spoken his words about the importance of the martyrdom, he did not want to incite the armed revolt against the imperialism, as Pearse did instead, but the spiritual inspiration that nourished their meditations was the same, as the chosen date to unleash the rebellion seemed to confirm.

Attesting the goodness of the insurgents' intentions and the nobility of their holocaust, the priests could therefore defend their reputation and compose their martyrology. O'Riordan and Hagan argued that the republican leaders were not the *Carbonari,* whom Italian press had talked about, but "practicing Catholics: someone, a man of exceptional religious piety" (Anonimo [Hagan, O'Riordan] 1916, 20). In order to confirm the faith of the militants executed by the British, the clergymen reproduced some of the letters that they had written before the execution, which proved their profound devotion. The intensity of the narrative reached its apogee when the authors came to describe the entire Easter Rising as a great collective martyrdom. The British had indeed distinguished themselves through the brutality of the repression, while on the other side of the barricade, "in the buildings occupied and defended by the insurgents, rosary crowns and other devotions were recited without interruption. On Sunday during the uprising, they tried to have a priest who celebrated Mass for them, to fulfil the festive precept" (21).

The legitimation of the moral behaviour of rebels also involved those who did not come from a strictly Catholic extraction. Roger Casement, who was born into a wealthy Anglo-Irish family and had been an important official of the British colonial administration for many years, "gives his name as a Catholic to be recognized as such in the prison. An Irish priest who is a chaplain in the prison in London where he [Casement] was imprisoned, wrote me that he had instructed Casement and received him in the Catholic Church before his execution" (*ibidem*). If Casement, however, was already internationally known thanks to its anti-slavery reports in defence of the black people of the Belgian Congo and of the indigenous people of Putu-

mayo, which had a great echo within Catholic world, the inclusion of other personalities was even more surprising. The Protestant and socialist suffragist Constance Markiewicz, who fought in the ranks of the workers' militia, "was so impressed by the religious sentiments of those with whom she was associated that she asked to be received in the church" (*ibidem*). Even the marxist syndicalist James Connolly, an advocate of the social revolution and of the establishment of a proletarian republic, who was referred to as "a sort of socialist" in the pamphlet, eventually was included among the martyrs because "he died with a feeling of true and fervent Catholic" (*ibidem*).

The consecration of the socialist revolutionaries was particularly extraordinary if we consider the bewilderment that the new urban poverty and the growth of a conflictual worker movement, which was inspired by the industrialism of the American Industrial Workers of the World rather than the British trade unionism, had provoked within the Irish Church, which was largely perched on the positions expressed in the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII as regards social doctrine. Connolly himself aspired to spread the socialism among the Catholic masses, so he publicly engaged in a theoretical battle with the Jesuit Father Robert Kane in 1910 about the question of the compatibility between Catholicism and socialism that most of the clergy severely denied (Harris 2001, 349). O'Riordan also had harshly criticized the behaviour of the trade unionists, exposing his resolute anti-socialism, in some of his letters sent to Hagan during the Dublin Lockout of 1913[24]. The Rector had therefore changed his judgment on the Irish socialists only after the trauma of the World War, which had caused a considerable rapprochement of his positions to the more radical ones of Hagan. The thesis supported in the brochure precisely represented the outcome of this sudden political evolution.

The aversion to the war and the recourse to the archetype of Christian martyrdom allowed the priests to justify the insurgents from an ethical point of view and to operate a profound re-elaboration of the boundaries of the Irish nation. The idea of the Irishness could no longer be reduced either to the profession of faith or to the evocation of an ancestral Gaelic civilization, but it expanded to include even the previously excluded social sectors. The unity of the Irish nation was reshaped to include a plurality of cultural and political movements, bearers of different and potentially conflicting instances. The subsumption of new subjects did not undermine the primacy of the Catholicism, which continued to innervate the O'Riordan and Hagan's conception of homeland. On the contrary, all the rebels, both republicans and socialists, both Catholics and Protestants, were eventually welcomed

[24] Michael O'Riordan to John Hagan, 27 November 1913; Michael O'Riordan to John Hagan, 10 December 1913.

into the fold of Catholic Ireland by virtue of their martyrdom. According to the leaders of Irish College, even the members of the most extremist political components of the Eastern Rising, that the governments and the press of all the Allied Powers had stigmatized as fierce and bloody individuals, were therefore sons of the island of the saints, in all respects.

Not surprisingly, the publication of the brochure called the attention and the hostility of the Italian authorities. Furthermore, the seminar was already known as a neutralist stronghold, so some newspapers of liberal interventionism, such as Milan's *Il Secolo*, had explicitly denounced the College as a pro-German propaganda hub during the fighting in Dublin, urging the government to act against it[25]. The State apparatus feared above all that the clerics could influence the Vatican and help to radicalise the Pope's neutralism. Indeed, the Cabinet of the Minister of the Interior so addressed the Director General of the Public Security Giacomo Vigliani, the highest police charge, in a note sent on October 16, 1916: "the fanatic and ignorant Irish clergy compromises the Vatican stating that the Holy See is in favour of the insurrection that would favour peace, desired as immediate by Benedict XV"[26]. The Head of the Cabinet of the Ministry of the Interior Camillo Corradini solicited the investigations of the pamphlet at the end of October, followed in November by the Head of the military intelligence services, Colonel Giovanni Garruccio, who had come to know it thanks to the seizure of a letter sent by an Italian journalist to a New York news agency, where the contents of the booklet were illustrated[27].

The police managed to question the typographer who was responsible for the publication after several weeks of investigation, and he confirmed that Monsignor O'Riordan had commissioned the press. The Prefect of Rome Faustino Aphel obtained the seizure order on November 13; thereafter, he turned to Vigliani to ask him whether it was appropriate to proceed against the typographer and to gain access to the Irish College in order to commandeer any copies possibly held there[28]. Vigliani transmitted the question to Corradini, but there is no evidence of an answer from the latter, nor

[25] See, for example, Anonimo (1916c), "Il Vaticano e I moti irlandesi", *Il Secolo,* 29 aprile.

[26] Nota del Gabinetto del Ministero degli Affari Interni al Direttore Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza Commissario Giacomo Vigliani, 16 ottobre 1916.

[27] Lettera del Capo del Gabinetto del Ministero degli Affari Interni Camillo Corradini alla Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, 26 ottobre 1916; Lettera del Capo del Servizio Informazioni del Comando Supremo del Regio Esercito Italiano Colonnello Giovanni Garruccio alla Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, 18 novembre 1916.

[28] Lettera del Prefetto di Roma Faustino Aphel alla Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, 2 dicembre 1916.

of an irruption in the seminary in search of the documents[29]. The leaders of the Ministry of the Interior therefore probably preferred to desist, partly because the text had been distributed to the Pope and the cardinals for some time. Even if the repressive action had not had any real consequences, the perturbation aroused by the pamphlet confirmed that the Great Britain-allied Italian government perceived the propaganda activity of O'Riordan and Hagan as a danger. The political perspective suggested by their new idea of homeland contemplated indeed the possibility of a collaboration among those who objected to the Irish participation in the war, while they denied whatever legitimacy to any British hypothesis to introduce the conscription into the Emerald Isle.

5. Conclusion

The idea of the Irish nation exhibited by O'Riordan and Hagan in the pamphlet about the Easter Rising, which presented the episode as a Catholic revolt against war, represented the point of arrival of a process of political maturation stimulated by the impact with the world conflict. If Hagan was probably already inclined to flank a radical nationalist strategy, the evolution of O'Riordan was much deeper and more traumatic, and it eventually convinced the moderate Rector to defend the reasons for an insurrectional attempt in which socialists and revolutionary unions' members had also participated. Anyhow, the members of the Irish College joined in a shared propaganda initiative that aimed to influence the judgment of Pope Benedict XV and to preserve the hegemony of the Catholic Church within the Irish revolutionary movement in the new political phase, too.

The two priests tried to follow their aspirations towards the rediscovery of a peculiar Christian and Gaelic civilization or towards a distinctive Irish progress, alternative to the secular and technocratic one of the rest of Europe, in the context of a country wracked by the contrasts between unionists, nationalists, republicans and socialists, by identifying those sectors that opposed the war as the guardians of the Irish national otherness. The reference to the martyrdom that distinguished the September 1916 O'Riordan's pamphlet turned out to be functional to justify the transition from a more or less organicist idea of homeland to a more multifaceted and composite conception, which was placed under the aegis of a renewed Catholic nationalism but wasn't devoid of a certain social radicalism.

We can say that O'Riordan and Hagan were oriented in their reflections and in their work by two fundamental purposes: on the one hand, the

[29] Lettera del Direttore Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza Commissario Giacomo Vigliani al Gabinetto del Ministero degli Affari Interni, 7 dicembre 1916.

need to persuade the Holy See of the relevance of the Irish question for the Catholic cause; on the other hand, the ambition to emancipate the national demands of the Irish Catholics from the universal ones of the papacy. If the *Monsignore* was probably more closely linked to the pursuit of the first objective, the Vice Rector proved to be more sensitive to the quest of a greater national autonomy instead. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to contrast an "ultramontane" O'Riordan to a "modernist" Hagan. Despite their different sensibilities, on the contrary, both men were involved in the season of labour and transformation that characterized not only the Irish Church but also the whole body of the European political Catholicism in the climate of the First World War. The same desire to achieve greater self-determination on matters of national politics that persuaded some reformist Catholics of the Allied Powers to support the war effort of their respective countries and to assume openly imperialist positions, however, convinced the Irish clerics to redefine theirs their nation boundaries in an inclusive sense, leading them to elaborate an idea of homeland with clear anti-colonial implications[30].

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[30] The bibliography about the political choices of Catholic movements in the face of the Great War is unlimited. With regard to the Italian case and to the interventionist turning point of a large part of reformist or progressive Catholicism, see, for example, Bedeschi 1959, 220-223; Candeloro 1972 [1953], 376; De Rosa 1977, 182; 1988 [1970], 295.

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