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# An Irishman's Diary

**PATRICK** Joyce, William Hornibrook, Herbert Woods; are those names familiar to you? Probably not. They are some of the disappeared of 1920-1922. Patrick Joyce's body was found in a bog in Connemara last year. The bodies of Woods and Hornibrook, Protestants abducted by the IRA in Cork in 1922, have never been found. What happened to their killers? Did they go on to high office in Ireland? Did they found well-revered political dynasties?

Personal memoirs from that time are striking unremorseful about perfectly unspeakable murder, the cruellest events being subsumed in a benign porridge of amnesia and weasel words. How do the men — and the women — responsible for terrible deeds then live with those deeds? How it is that Irish republicanism can remain triumphantly unrepentant, can actually sneer at the dead, as Eamonn Molloy was sneered at even as the jumble of bones to which he had been reduced was finally surrendered?

**Bloody Sunday**

In 1920, a secretary in Dublin Castle supplied Michael Collins with some of the intelligence which resulted in the Bloody Sunday *battue* in which 19 soldiers or ex-soldiers, some of them secret agents, some not, including an Irish vet just back from Egypt, were murdered in cold blood. The moral machinery at work is illuminated in Tim Pat Coogan's account. "Joe Dolan was so disgusted at finding one prime target, Major King, was missing. . . that he took revenge by giving his half-naked *mistress* 'a right scourging with a sword scabbard', setting fire to the room afterwards."

Mistress; not girlfriend, not fiancée, not partner; but mistress, a fallen woman: in Joe Dolan's eyes, no doubt, good value for a beating. And Charlie Dalton, after helping kill four men, suddenly remembered that he had not been to mass that morning. "I slipped out and, in the silence before the altar, I thought over our morning's work and offered up a prayer for the fallen."

The conscience of the young secretary in Dublin Castle was not to be appeased by a single prayer, but in confession a priest assured her she had committed no sin. Collins, on hear-

## **Michael Collins: dismissed qualms of conscience**

ing about the secretary's qualms of conscience, remarked that she needn't have worried: he had a priest in the Pro-Cathedral who could be relied on to absolve any of the larger sins which might keep a lad (or lass) awake at night. Ah yes; as the expression went, a true Irishman and a great Catholic.

The role of certain priests remains the same today as 79 years ago: to enable killers to purge themselves of whatever residues of guilt have escaped the moral brainwashing that occurs within the sect-like culture of the IRA. A young IRA woman in Belfast once told me of a priest whose forte was to wave an absolving hand at paramilitary offences, no questions asked. But woe betide any girl or boy if sex were mentioned; no, for the wickedness of sexuality, she and her chums would go elsewhere.

### **Ustase Franciscans**

What moral abyss did clerical fascists like that priest carve in young people's breasts? How many lives were corrupted and ruined by such confessional debauchery, redolent of the Ustase Franciscans who urged Croats to kill Serbs for Christ? And how how much more human suffering was then created by these moral amputees who had been touched by the ju-ju of priestly benediction?

These chaplains were not a

sideshow but were absolutely vital to "the armed struggle". No war as witless and futile and unproductive as the one we have witnessed over the past 30 years could have been waged without an almost ceaseless supply of moral justification and exoneration. For that is what keeps wars going; not guns, not anger, not injustice, but a boundless righteousness, which could not have been sustained within the hearts of the primary movers of the war without a strong and guiding sense of divine approval. "The war is just. You have not sinned. Go in peace. Sort of."

Within the degraded moral landscape of the IRA, genuine apologies and full inquiries are things that it is given but does not give.

Against all my expectations, individual loyalist paramilitaries seem more inclined to express regret and remorse at their deeds over the decades. IRA members, morally endorsed by "republicanism's" weird cultic, Catholic and perfectly unrepublican ethos, and reinforced when necessary by the odd sturdy chaplain or two, seem to have been liberated from the promptings of conscience, just as soldiers in Africa are liberated from fear when annointed with bullet-proof water.

## **The big lie**

Maybe the hand-over of the dead bodies is the truest sign that the war is over. I'm sure that's what the McAdams leadership wants. But the seed-bed of further war is being laid if we permit the big lie to succeed again; if we permit IRA falsehood to triumph over these Troubles as it did, politically, educationally and morally, for the period 1919-1922, with its recognition of two classes of victim: those killed by The Other Side, worthy of memorials and National Graves Association glory, and the Hornibrooks, Joyces and Woods, the reviled and vanished dead who don't even get a grave.

The lies about 1916-1922 entered the political ethos of this State; taken in undiluted measure, they form the basis for the IRA's existence. Unconfronted and unrefuted, they are the virus which will sooner or later return to plague us all.

**KEVIN MYERS**

