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ARTICLE

Catholicism and Modernity in Irish Political Thought: The Case of Aodh de Blácam

Seán Donnelly* (iD)

Independent scholar
*Corresponding author. E-mail: sean.donnelly092@gmail.com

The political thought of Ireland's revolutionary generation has, in recent years, attracted increasing attention from scholars. However, the historiography of the Irish revolution and its aftermath remains marked by an enduring tendency to critique, rather than contextualize, the types of nationalist and religious motivations proffered commonly to justify political action in the early decades of the twentieth century. Focusing on the intellectual output of one highly original and conspicuously under-researched thinker, Aodh de Blácam, this article seeks to make some contribution towards redressing this historiographical deficit. In addition to highlighting the richness of the engagement with international debates in political theory that obtained among many members of Ireland's revolutionary generation, de Blácam's work illustrates vividly the heterodox range of influences that shaped Irish nationalism between the wars and the diverse conceptions of modernity that were formulated in response to the social and economic upheaval of the period.

I

In line with international historiographical trends, the political thought of Ireland's revolutionary generation has, in recent years, attracted increasing attention from scholars.[1] Much of the earliest work on the revolutionary period and its aftermath focused on source materials connected with the internal politics of governments and political parties, Anglo-Irish diplomacy, and the building of state institutions both north and south of the border established following the passage of the Government of Ireland Act in 1920.[2] Furthermore, as is by now widely accepted, much of the historiography produced against the backdrop of the Troubles in Northern Ireland exhibited, perhaps inevitably, a moralistic preoccupation with the competing doctrines of "Nationalism" and "Unionism" and the associated democratic legitimacy of the administrations established in Belfast and Dublin in 1920 and 1922 respectively.[3] Concerned

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[1]For more on the growing influence of intellectual-history methodologies internationally see, for example, Richard Whatmore, *What Is Intellectual History?* (Cambridge, 2015), 21–44.

[2]Richard Bourke, "Historiography," in Richard Bourke and Ian McBride, eds., *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton, 2016), 271–91.

[3]See, for example, Ciaran Brady, ed., *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism* (Dublin, 1994); D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day, eds., *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London, 1996).

principally to engage with highly politically charged and presentist questions regarding the role of ethnic and sectarian animosities in shaping Irish nationalism, as well as the ambiguous character of Ireland's historic relation to the British Empire and the colonial or otherwise status of the contemporary Northern Irish state, such scholarship paid little heed to the self-understanding expressed by relevant historical actors and was largely unconcerned to explore the role of ideas in catalyzing political action.[4] Little focus was devoted to reconstructing faithfully the full intricacy of the perspectives proffered in relevant primary source materials, nor was adequate attention paid to the task of properly contextualizing and understanding relevant actors in their appropriate intellectual milieu. The types of nationalist and religious motivations proffered commonly to justify political action in the early decades of the twentieth century were more frequently appraised or critiqued than they were contextualized or explained. Those actors willing to have recourse to violence in the pursuit of their political ambitions, meantime, tended to be pathologized or condemned rather than understood, dismissed commonly as in thrall to some "irrational," "mystic," or "romantic" impulse undeserving of serious scholarly consideration.[5] Indeed, on the rare occasions when political ideas were analyzed in early histories of the Irish revolution, they tended to be framed as simple vectors for the pursuit of social and economic advancement. Drawing on methodologies developed by the political sociologist Barrington Moore, as well as the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch, for instance, Tom Garvin argued that the Irish revolution was animated principally by social resentment shared widely among a rising generation of newly educated Catholic nationalists.[6] In this analysis, public professions of political conviction—be they nationalist, republican, religious, socialist, feminist, or otherwise—are dismissed as epiphenomenal, or reframed as hollow verbiage deployed cynically to cloak the base pursuit of material self-interest in a veneer of idealism. As Michael Laffan put it in his analysis of the "Beliefs and Attitudes" underlying the Irish revolution, "People joined Sinn Féin in their tens of thousands because they were attracted by its image, not because they believed in its ideology. They joined because their Anglophobia surfaced after the Easter Rising and during the conscription crisis … As well as appealing to idealism and self-sacrifice, Sinn Féin could exploit xenophobia, resentment and greed."[7]

Nevertheless, just as Irish society and politics have evolved greatly in the period following the ratification of the Good Friday Agreement (1998), so too has the historiography of modern Ireland. The traditional preoccupations with state legitimacy and institution building, referenced above, have been substantially displaced and superseded by more comparative and methodologically pluralist approaches dealing with a range of hitherto overlooked social and economic themes, particularly those connected with gender, class, and (increasingly) race. The influence of political ideas, too, has attracted increased historiographical attention. Just as female

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[4]Richard Bourke, "Reflections on the Political Thought of the Irish Revolution," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (2017), 175–91.

[5]See, for example, Seán Farrell Moran, "Patrick Pearse and the European Revolt against Reason," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989), 625–43; Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (London, 1977).

[6]Tom Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland 1858–1928: Patriots, Priests and the Roots of the Irish Revolution* (Oxford, 1987), 110.

[7]Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916–1923* (Cambridge, 2004), 214.

historians, such as Senia Pašeta and Leann Lane, have done much to recover the intellectual lives of prominent revolutionary women,[8] the contributions of scholars such as Patrick Maume, Bryan Fanning, and Richard Bourke have cast new light on the role of ideas in shaping political developments on the island of Ireland between 1912 and 1922.[9] The growing influence of this approach is reflected vividly in the decision of Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought to publish an edited collection of primary source materials produced by some of the most influential publicists and thinkers of Ireland's revolutionary generation.[10]

But for all this work has contributed to deepening our understanding of the heterodox nexus of ideas and vocabularies that conditioned the development of the Irish revolution and its aftermath, there remains much to be done in terms of recovering and reconstructing the intellectual world that the revolutionary generation inhabited. It is striking, for instance, how little genealogical work has been done on even very prominent thinkers, such as Patrick Pearse and Erskine Childers, with a view to better understanding the source materials that shaped their thinking and led them to arrive at relevant political perspectives. Similarly, there has been a conspicuous lack of focus devoted to situating Irish political thinkers, as well as the debates and traditions in which they participated, in the broader context of interwar Europe. The political thought of the Irish revolution is still too frequently framed as particular to an Anglo-Irish context and interpreted in isolation from broader discussions regarding alternative forms of political representation and political economy that percolated across Europe in the years around World War I. Furthermore, more focus needs to be devoted to uncovering the vital strands of intellectual continuity that connect the political thought of the Irish revolution to the development of the Free State in its aftermath.[11] Too often 1922 is depicted as a *tabula rasa* in Irish history, a moment when the Civil War "drained all the energy and imagination" that had animated the revolution and thus permitted the Cumann na nGaedheal government, in concert with the Catholic Church, to pursue a reactionary reversion to the pre-revolutionary status quo.[12] In this analysis, ideas are

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[8] See, for example, Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 2013); Pašeta, "Feminist Political Thought and Activism in Revolutionary Ireland, c.1880–1918," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (2017), 193–209; Leann Lane, *Rosamond Jacob: Third Person Singular* (Dublin, 2010); Lane, *Dorothy Macardle* (Dublin, 2019); Lauren Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz* (Princeton, 2016); Mary McAuliffe, *Margaret Skinnider* (Dublin, 2020).

[9] See, for example, Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life, 1891–1918* (Dublin, 1999); Bryan Fanning, *The Quest for Modern Ireland: The Battle of Ideas 1912–1986* (Dublin, 2008); R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890–1923* (London, 2014); Colin W. Reid, "Democracy, Sovereignty and Unionist Political Thought during the Revolutionary Period in Ireland, c.1912–1922," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (2017), 211–32; Richard Bourke, "Political and Religious Ideas during the Irish Revolution," *History of European Ideas* 46/7 (2020), 997–1008; Aidan Beatty, "The Problem of Capitalism in Irish Catholic Social Thought, 1922–1950," *Études irlandaises* 46/2 (2021), 43–68.

[10] Richard Bourke and Niamh Gallagher, eds., *The Political Thought of the Irish Revolution* (Cambridge, 2022).

[11] Jason Knirck's work on the revolutionary vocabulary of the Free State government in prosecuting the Civil War is a welcome early signal of progress in this regard. See Jason Knirck, *Afterimage of the Revolution: Cumann na nGaedheal and Irish Politics, 1922–1932* (Madison, 2014).

[12] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1995), 263. John M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-revolution, 1921–36: Treatyite Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001).

essentially understood to have vanished from Irish political life as the government retreated into a sterile managerialism intended to ensure stability at the expense of any serious attempt to institutionalize the ideas that animated the revolution.[13] While the Eamon de Valera-led Fianna Fáil government that assumed office in 1932 is generally credited with recovering a greater semblance of the broadly republican and economically protectionist sentiments that had animated the revolution, the dominant approach remains that of appraising their period in office, rather than tracing the lineage of the ideas that animated their policy making. This historiographical tendency, embodied in the titles comprising the Royal Irish Academy's influential Judging series,[14] is particularly marked in examinations of the Free State's social policy, notably in its treatment of unmarried mothers and their children, as well as its handling of poor relief and its religiously conditioned attitude toward gender and sexual morality.

Clearly, scholars are entitled to adopt whatever approach they wish in studying the past and it is manifestly legitimate to criticize the range of inequalities that marked the society of the Irish Free State. Indeed, such research has yielded valuable insights regarding the complex range of factors that shaped the moral and political economy of successive Free State governments.[15] However, the overwhelming emphasis on retrospective appraisal that characterizes the historiography of early twentieth-century Ireland too often comes at the expense of reconstruction and contextualization. The Irish Free State has, consequently, been substantially dismissed as an intellectual backwater, host to what Tom Garvin labeled an essentially premodern "collectivist and conformist" political culture that endorsed "a traditional Catholic distrust of human reason" and so "regarded the natural individualism of the intellectual" as "a threat."[16] J. J. Lee similarly highlighted "clerical hostility to independent thought" as fundamental to fomenting the condition of "intellectual retardation" that he judged to define the society of the Irish Free State, noting that the "official mind set of 'traditional' Ireland was monolithic. Intellectual dissenters either emigrated or were marginalised."[17] In most accounts, it is not until the 1960s that twenty-six-county Ireland is judged to have belatedly acquired "modernity"—and, with it, meaningful intellectual debate in civic life—under the reforming influence of Taoiseach Seán Lemass and senior civil servant T. K. Whittaker, figures attributed regularly with the grandiose moniker "architect of modern Ireland."[18] The Republic's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 is commonly depicted as a watershed in the history of the independent state, a year in which "many old moulds were broken with

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[13]Bill Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford, 2005), 175.

[14]Diarmaid Ferriter, *Judging Dev: A Reassessment of the Life and Legacy of Eamon de Valera* (Dublin, 2007); Tom Garvin, *Judging Lemass: The Measure of the Man* (Dublin, 2009); Michael Laffan, *Judging W. T. Cosgrave: The Foundation of the Irish State* (Dublin, 2014).

[15]See, for example, Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child: Maternity and Child Welfare in Dublin, 1922–1960* (Manchester, 2007); Earner-Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic Poor: Poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920–1940* (Cambridge, 2017).

[16]Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland*, 110.

[17]J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985* (Cambridge, 1989), 407, 610.

[18]See, for example, Paul Bew and Henry Patterson, *Sean Lemass and the Making of Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1982); Anne Chambers, *T. K. Whitaker: Portrait of a Patriot* (Dublin, 2014).

apparent decisiveness," thus facilitating the growing economic prosperity, secularization, and social liberalization regarded popularly as the keynotes of "Modern Ireland."[19] As the influential journalist Fintan O'Toole reflected in a recent "personal history" of Ireland since the 1950s, "The transformation of Ireland over the last sixty years has sometimes felt as if a new world had landed from outer space on an old one," uprooting the "suffocatingly coherent and fixed" Catholic, nationalist identity that had predominated during the period of the Free State, and replacing it with a new set of quintessentially "modern" values "in which old animosities would matter much less than practicality and prosperity."[20]

   Dismissed commonly as a wasteland of nationalist and religious retrogression, therefore, the intellectual world of the Irish Free State remains inadequately understood and insufficiently contextualized. Focusing on the intellectual output of one highly original and conspicuously under-researched thinker, Aodh de Blácam, this article seeks to make some contribution towards redressing this historiographical deficit. Indeed, aside from a valuable entry to the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, de Blácam is at best peripheral to—and more commonly absent entirely from—most histories of the Irish revolution, and his political writings have yet to be subject to any sustained, critical analysis.[21] But in addition to highlighting the richness of the engagement with international debates in political theory that obtained among many members of Ireland's revolutionary generation, de Blácam's work illustrates vividly the heterodox range of influences that shaped Irish nationalism between the wars. In particular, his sophisticated attempt to synthesize core tenets of revolutionary socialism with Irish–Ireland nationalism and contemporary Catholic social teaching complicates reductive characterizations of the Irish Civil War (1922–3) as "a belated victory of the Catholic establishment over the republican political traditions of the Irish Republican Brotherhood."[22] For in undertaking a detailed reconstruction of the perspectives proffered by thinkers such as de Blácam, we can observe how these two ostensibly irreconcilable strands in Irish nationalism often existed in complex, creative tension and were by no means felt by contemporaries to be morally or intellectually incompatible. Indeed, de Blácam recognized explicitly that Ireland "is peculiar among nations, because in her the most advanced revolutionary spirit is united with the most conservative religious tradition," adding, "we have had for three years the curious situation of a government with conservative objects working in a revolutionary atmosphere and by revolutionary methods."[23] Addressing Dáil Éireann two years later, Justice Minister Kevin O'Higgins made similar reference the complex correlation of Catholic and Enlightenment sources in shaping Irish nationalism, referencing the

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[19]R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London 1989), 569; see also Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why Was Ireland So Poor for So Long?* (Dublin, 2004).

[20]Fintan O'Toole, *We Don't Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Ireland since 1958* (London, 2021), 5, 179.

[21]See, for example, de Blácam's absence from, or peripherality to, Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland*; Lee, *Ireland*; Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*; Foster, *Vivid Faces*.

[22]Owen McGee, *The IRB: The Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Fein* (Dublin, 2005), 364.

[23]Aodh de Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For: The Irish Republican Movement; Its History, Aims and Ideals, Examined as to Their Significance to the World* (Dublin, 1921), 133, 231.

Free State leadership as the "most conservative-minded revolutionaries that ever put through a successful revolution."[24] It is, ultimately, only by undertaking a close, contextual reading of the speeches and published work of those, like de Blácam, who gave the revolution its intellectual shape that we can hope to comprehend the ostensibly paradoxical interplay of progressive and reactionary temperaments, perspectives and beliefs that underlay the broad Sinn Féin coalition and conditioned the subsequent development of the Free State.[25]

II

De Blácam was born Hugh Saunders Blackham in London on 11 December 1891. Son of William George Blackham, a Newry-born apothecarist, and his English wife, Elizabeth, Blackham descended from a well-established family in Newry and was raised as an evangelical Protestant. But as Patrick Maume documents in an essential entry to the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, Blackham experienced as a young man a religious crisis upon discovering that his schoolmasters were not biblical literalists.[26] On learning subsequently that his father had been a Protestant Home Ruler with republican sympathies, he gravitated inexorably thereafter in the direction of Catholicism and Irish nationalism. Indeed, Blackham timed his first visit to Dublin in 1910 to coincide with the opening of a new Sinn Féin headquarters. By the time the Great War erupted four years later, he had converted to Catholicism, Gaelicized his identity and relocated permanently to Dublin, where he made his living as a freelance journalist. Interned briefly during the War of Independence, de Blácam worked as a propagandist with the nationalist journalist and Sinn Féin party founder, Arthur Griffith, as well as Herbert Moore Pim. In 1918, he succeeded Pim as editor of the influential nationalist weekly *Young Ireland*. Remarkably prolific in his journalistic and literary output throughout his life, de Blácam also produced during this period two political manifestos, *Towards the Republic* (1918) and *What Sinn Féin Stands For* (1921), texts that form the focus of the present article owing to the window they provide into the rich intellectual world of the Irish revolution.[27] De Blácam opposed the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, decrying the settlement as a triumph of "expediency" over "principle," and participated in republican propaganda activities during the Civil War—practices for which he was interned in 1922.[28] For the next quarter-century his fortunes would be linked closely to those of the long-serving taoiseach and leader of Fianna Fáil Éamon de Valera, whom he regarded as the most approximate incarnation of his social and political ideals. In addition to contributing to the *Irish*

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[24]Dáil Éireann debate, 1 March 1923 (vol. 2, No. 35).

[25]For more on the contextual, as opposed to the doctrinal, essence of conservatism see Richard Bourke, "What Is Conservatism? History, Ideology and Party," *European Journal of Political Theory* 17/4 (2018), 449–75.

[26]Patrick Maume, "De Blacam, Aodh," in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, at https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.002455.v1.

[27]Aodh de Blácam, *Towards the Republic: A Study of New Ireland's Social and Political Aims* (Dublin, 1918); de Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*.

[28]Aodh de Blácam, *An Appeal to "Ultimate" Republicans: Why Not Make the Advance Now?* (Dublin, 1922), 3.

Times, the *Irish Independent*, and *The Standard*, he is best remembered for his satirical "Roddy the Rover" column, which appeared in the *Irish Press* from 1931 to 1947. Settled on a small farm in Ravensdale, Co. Louth, de Blácam eventually left Fianna Fáil for Clann na Poblachta in protest at the government's handling of rural depopulation, and was consequently dismissed from his position at the *Irish Press*. At the 1948 general election he was an unsuccessful candidate in Louth, polling less than 5 percent of the vote; however, on the formation of the 1948–51 interparty government, he was appointed an official spokesman for the Department of Health and speechwriter to minister Noel Browne. In that capacity, he supported the implementation of the controversial "Mother and Child Scheme," a program aimed at providing free maternity and child care as part of the restructuring of the health service, and continued to urge that the government do more to curtail emigration and the associated issue of rural depopulation. De Blácam died on 13 January 1951 and was survived by his wife Mary McCarville and two sons.

Holy Romans, De Blácam's 1920 *Bildungsroman*, provides a fascinating insight into both the idiosyncratic character of his intellectual formation and the moral and ideological preoccupations that drew him to Catholicism and Sinn Féin. Centered on the experience of Shane Lambert, the London-based son of a Newry-born apothecarist possessed of Irish nationalist sympathies (and thus de Blácam's alter ego), the novel recounts its protagonist's growing disaffection from the materialist inclinations of London's Protestant middle class and his eventual "conversion" to both "the Gaelic movement" and, ultimately, the Catholic Church.[29] Many aspects of the story are familiar enough; we learn, for instance, of the spiritual awakening provoked in the young Lambert upon his initial exposure to the Irish language at a local church concert as a boy.[30] We hear, thereafter, of the adolescent Lambert's growing interest in Irish folklore and history, his exposure to "Fenian" ideals, and his gradual integration into the Irish Catholic community of north London.[31] However, scholars would be mistaken to dismiss *Holy Romans* as merely a saccharine, generic account of the mystical attraction of Irish nationalism to an impressionable young romantic. The novel further yields significant insights into de Blácam's then still gestational political outlook, in particular the importance of social and economic redistribution to his theory of Irish nationalism. After all, the three most significant figures in drawing the young Lambert to Catholicism and Sinn Féin are by no means conventional vectors of what de Blácam contemptuously labeled elsewhere a "pugnacious 'Faith-and-Fatherland' bombast."[32] They include a Marxist and evolutionist in Fergus O'Cyran, a mystic in Peter Joyce, and a trade unionist in Fargal Fall. Other influential figures include Jimmy the Cope, an impassioned advocate of the co-operative farming movement in County Donegal, and Paddy McPoland, a revolutionary socialist and vituperative critic of the twin evils of "imperialism" and "bourgeois nationalism."[33] Indeed, de Blácam is at pains throughout the novel to impress upon his reader the vibrancy of

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[29]Aodh de Blácam, *Holy Romans: A Young Irishman's Story* (Dublin, 1920), 103.
[30]Ibid., 10.
[31]Ibid., 23.
[32]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 81.
[33]De Blácam, *Holy Romans*, 282.

the intellectual world that produced the Irish revolution. His depiction of the "smoke-room of the Egyptian Cafe, near Stephen's Green," on the eve of the 1916 Easter Rising, for instance, is evocative of the Parisian left bank—a "resort of young literary Dublin" where "the revolutionary journalists and the intelligentsia met evening by evening."[34] His protagonist, meantime, reacts viscerally against press depictions of the rising as merely an anarchic insurrection led by "cornerboys of unknown origin in the pay of Hun secret service."[35] But although critical of the material avarice of the Catholic middle classes and, on occasion, of the role of the Church in inhibiting the spread of class consciousness among workers, Lambert is persuaded ultimately of both the moral righteousness of Sinn Féin's anti-imperial nationalism and of the capacity of the Catholic Church to reconcile the great social and economic challenges of the postwar world: "In Fergus, the scientist, he had seen that the Church could be modern. Old Peter, the mystic, had shown him that a Catholic could be a visionary and a dreamer. Fargal Fall had taught him that a man could be a devoted Catholic and no slave."[36]

By the close of the novel, therefore, Lambert is convinced that, although one is unlikely ever to encounter "a sermon on the sins of the rich,"[37] the Catholic Church is the institution best placed to restore stability to a world ravaged both by the experience of the Great War and by the unprecedented social and economic instability that arose in its wake. Indeed, his protagonist's assessment of World War I as a kind of moral judgment on a decadent and declining civilization, one that had strayed far from its Christian origins and allowed wrong to become "enthroned and unchallenged, ruling with the bribe of material prosperity," places de Blácam firmly in the mainstream of interwar Catholic political thinking.[38] This perception was further nourished by his engagement with the seminal, postwar prophecies of Western sociocultural decay published by the German philosopher Oswald Spengler and the French social geographer Albert Demangeon.[39] Indeed, de Blácam, though critical of the "determinism" and "fatalism" he judged to mark Spengler's cyclical theory of history, endorsed fully the perspective "that

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[34]Ibid., 238.

[35]Ibid., 269.

[36]Ibid., 233.

[37]Ibid., 244.

[38]Ibid., 237. For more on this wider European context see Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe 1918–1945* (London, 1997); Darrell Jodock, ed., *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge, 2000); James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridge, MA, 2018); Giuliana Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade: The Vatican's Battle to Remake Christian Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2019); Sarah Shortall, *Soldiers of God in a Secular World: Catholic Theology and Twentieth-Century French Politics* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).

[39]For engagement with Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 1, *Form and Actuality*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (London, 1918); Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, *Perspectives of World History*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (London, 1922), see Aodh de Blácam, "Heroic Ireland," in *The Saint Brigid Readers* (Senior) (London, 1935), 65–73; de Blácam, "Review: The Decline of the West by O. Spengler," *Irish Monthly* 63/746 (1935), 539–48; de Blácam, "Decline of the West: The Death of a Philosopher," *Irish Press*, 28 May 1936, 8; de Blácam, "Review: New Views of Old History," *Irish Monthly* 75/889 (1947), 308–13. For engagement with Albert Demangeon's *Le déclin de l'Europe* (Paris, 1920), see Aodh de Blácam, "The Terrible Plight of Europe: Will Our Race Come Home?", *Irish Independent*, 14 July 1920, 4.

our Western society is moving towards a dreadful crisis."[40] Revealingly, he also framed contemporary London as exhibiting all the "marks of decay, presaging death," that Spengler had attributed to the late Roman Empire.[41] In this regard, de Blácam shared with the English Catholic historian Christopher Dawson the view that only a return to the values of "historic Christianity" could "renew" European civilization in the manner that "medieval Christendom" had done subsequent to the fall of the Roman Empire.[42] Both de Blácam and Dawson regarded World War I as the inevitable outcome of the moral decay fomented by the growth of liberal modernity in the century following the French Revolution. In this analysis, the secularization of politics and civic life, reflected in the spread of nationalism, industrialism, and capitalism, had stripped Europe of its traditional bonds of Christian unity and thus set the continent on a cataclysmic trajectory. Therefore it was only by returning to the Church and traditional Christian teaching that Europe could hope to prevent any renewal of the internecine violence that had arisen from nationalist and materialist rivalries.

   This view was shared widely by Catholics across Europe, including in the anglophone world. Just as G. K. Chesterton, for instance, averred that it was the "anticlerical and agnostic world" of "progressive and cosmopolitan sceptics" who should "have been abashed and confounded by the advent of Universal War," not the Catholic Church,[43] Hilaire Belloc was emphatic that, in reconstructing itself after the armistice, Europe must "return to the Faith, or she will perish."[44] Inevitably, perhaps, this outlook also commonly entailed a nostalgia for the social and political structures of medieval Europe, a period when the Church was supposed to have provided society with a universally accepted vision of human nature and the common good. In this account, Catholicism had bound together all the constituent elements of medieval societies—the family, the village, the profession, the Church, and the monarch—in an organic unity. Each group had its own sphere of authority, none overstepped their bounds, and if one constituency succumbed to hardship, material or otherwise, it was expected that the others would come to their aid, reflecting the same spirit of charity that was held to have underpinned the guild system. Thus, if the modern nation-state tended to centralize authority in the name of absolute sovereignty, the medieval polity, in this vision at least, remained loose and federal, lacking both the power and the will to mobilize society in the name of total war, or any other large-scale ideological project. As Pope Pius XI intoned gravely in his maiden 1922 encyclical, *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*,

One thing is certain today. Since the close of the Great War individuals, the different classes of society, the nations of the earth have not as yet found true peace … No merely human institution of today can be as successful in

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[40]De Blácam, "Review: The Decline of the West by O. Spengler," 544, 548.

[41]Ibid., 544.

[42]Ibid., 548; Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (London, 1929), 246–63. De Blácam engages with Dawson's Catholic diagnosis of European decline in the same review.

[43]G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (London, 1927), 10–11; see also Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome* (London, 1930), 311–16, 345–6.

[44]Hilaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (New York, 1920), 260–61; see also Belloc, *The Crisis of Our Civilization* (London, 1937).

devising a set of international laws which will be in harmony with world conditions as the Middle Ages were in the possession of that true League of Nations, Christianity.[45]

De Blácam's early endorsement of this perspective is expressed vividly in the closing pages of *Holy Romans* when his protagonist reflects ruefully on the anomie he experienced as a consequence of his materialistic upbringing, one he judged to have been devoid of transcendental purpose. "It's only one home of millions in the world to-day where the Faith is gone, and the people are selfish and cruel to one another, and narrow, with nothing supernatural in their lives," Lambert remarks bitterly. "That's what leaving the Church has brought the world to, and it has set the world at war."[46] This conviction would influence profoundly the subsequent course of de Blácam's intellectual output, for although he despised the social inequality that marked advanced industrial societies, and engaged deeply with socialist thinkers such as James Connolly, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels throughout his life, he ultimately believed that Catholicism—for all its flaws—was the only belief system that could ensure social peace and popular material prosperity under modern conditions. "The problem before the statesmen of all countries is now … to avert the collapse of our civilisation," de Blácam declared in 1921, adding that in "Pope Leo's utterances" readers can glimpse both the shape of "the coming crisis and the destined failures of un-Christian remedies." The Catholic Church, he concluded, had successfully "analysed the tendencies of our age" and "set forth the only possible way of escape."[47]

III

De Blácam's attempt to synthesize a Marxian critique of social inequality with the teachings of the Catholic Church and the central tenets of Irish–Ireland nationalism is expressed most fully in his 1918 manifesto, *Towards the Republic*, a text intended "to trace" what "Freedom and Gaelicism mean in 'real politics'."[48] He elaborates upon many of the same themes in *What Sinn Féin Stands For*, a book composed "when the War in Ireland was at its height," with the aim of recording the "ideals the English army was endeavouring to crush."[49] Depicting the rise of Sinn Féin and Irish–Ireland nationalism as a rejection of "the Anglicisation, Materialistic Liberalism and Benthamism" that had marked the tradition of constitutional nationalism since the days of Daniel O'Connell, de Blácam judged that the Irish public has been converted to a "patriotism of this apostolic sort [that] will demand liberty even where slavery is softened by luxury and disguised."[50] Indeed, he was convinced that although "the national war" between Ireland and the United

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[45]Pope Pius XI, *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*, 23 Dec. 1922, Section 45, at www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19221223_ubi-arcano-dei-consilio.html.

[46]De Blácam, *Holy Romans*, 306–7.

[47]Aodh de Blácam, "From the Watch Tower," *Irish Monthly* 49/527(1921), 83–5. He is referring here to Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, widely regarded as the foundational document of the modern tradition of Catholic social teaching.

[48]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, ix.

[49]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, vii.

[50]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, x, 12.

Kingdom "was also a social war,"[51] and mapped onto economic and material concerns, "the vital fact behind the 'Irish problem'" was always "Irish Nationality," a dynamic intellectual and political force which, "although founded in sentiment," is "none the less real."[52] In asserting this perspective, de Blácam was responding to the emergence of a large body of scholarship concerned to taxonomize the increasingly politically consequential concepts of "nation" and "nationalism," not least with respect to the challenge such ideas posed to European empires.[53] Inevitably, given the extraordinary influence of pseudoscientific doctrines of racial hierarchy in shaping later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European thought, many such accounts yielded distinctly *völkisch* definitions of nationhood, foregrounding deterministic ethnic and biological themes.[54] It is noteworthy, therefore, that in elaborating his conception of nationality, de Blácam drew principally upon two of the period's more "sweetly liberal" theorists: the French philosopher and historian Ernest Renan and the English academic and Liberal politician Ramsay Muir.[55] Rejecting "the extreme cosmopolitanism of Adam Smith," and those "classical economists" who "tended to ignore nationality amid materialistic doctrines," he proposed a primarily cultural conception of nationhood as a popularly shared sentiment rooted in "common traditions, common memories [and] common sacrifices."[56]

In this regard, de Blácam referenced Renan's influential 1882 address to the Sorbonne, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, an essay he praised both for exposing "the fallacy of racialism" and for "setting forth so vigorously the idea that nationality's function is not *material*, but *cultural*."[57] Renan, while recognizing nationality as "a living soul, a spiritual principle," did not consider nations as eternal, transhistorical entities.[58] Emphasizing the salience of common memories and shared traditions in sustaining national consciousness, Renan, in an oft-quoted phrase, defined nationhood as "a daily plebiscite," an essentially contingent political arrangement reliant, ultimately, upon the "clearly expressed desire [of a majority of the populace] to continue a common life."[59] Muir, likewise, defined nationhood loosely as "a body of people who feel themselves to be naturally linked together by certain affinities which are so strong and real … [that they] are dissatisfied when disunited, and cannot tolerate subjection to peoples who do not share these ties."[60] Contrary to the commonplace caricature of revolutionary Irish nationalism as a simple species of

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[51]Ibid., 19.

[52]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 21.

[53]Some of the most influential include J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London, 1902); V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow, 1917); G. P. Gooch, *Nationalism* (London, 1920); Carlton J. H. Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism* (New York, 1926).

[54]See, for example, the sources surveyed in George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York, 1978); Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, 1848–1918* (Cambridge, 1989).

[55]Aodh de Blácam, "Nationality in Economics," *Irish Monthly*, 46/544 (1918), 545–53, at 552.

[56]Ibid., 548–9.

[57]Ibid., original emphasis.

[58]Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882* (Paris, 1882), 26. De Blácam, "Nationality in Economics," 549, cites this phrase approvingly.

[59]Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, 27.

[60]Ramsey Muir, *Nationalism and Internationalism: The Culmination of Modern History* (London, 1916), 38; cited in de Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 22.

ethno-sectarian chauvinism, or "Anglophobia," de Blácam, and many of his con-
temporaries, regarded such culturally contingent conceptions of nationhood
extremely seriously.[61] It was believed widely that, were it not for the revival of inter-
est in Irish language and culture manifest in the creation of the Gaelic League (1893)
and the dawn of the Irish–Ireland movement, the nation would have ceased to exist,
subsumed amidst a rising tide of "anglicization."[62] Indeed, de Blácam was unequivo-
cal that "Irish nationality is not a matter of race or blood,"[63] and averred emphat-
ically that because Ireland is a historic nation, not "a province or a colony," it
could never "reconcile" comfortably to "English Imperialism" and required sover-
eign expression.[64] He determined, consequently, that to "ignore Ireland's claim to
be a nation is to ignore the essence of the case," and undertook to outline the
ideal form that an independent Catholic and Gaelic Ireland would take.[65]

Unsurprisingly, this vision was influenced profoundly by contemporary Catholic
social theory; the guild socialism of Arthur J. Penty, Alfred R. Orage, and Samuel
G. Hobson; and the histories of medieval Ireland produced by Catholic and nation-
alist fellow travellers, such as Darrell Figgis, George Russell, Eoin MacNeill, and
Alice Stopford Green.[66] Indeed, de Blácam conceived of both the "industrial revo-
lution and the capitalist era" as historical aberrations, doomed to extinction, and
professed optimism that "through the dissipating smoke" of the Great War and
its associated national and social upheavals, "the lineaments of the old world are
reappearing."[67] He considered Ireland "a medieval nation entering the modern
world" at a time when European civilization, "weary of the anarchy which false
ideals have involved it in," was "keenly interested in the Middle Ages" and sought
actively to recover the "customs, instincts and ideals" that had animated "the pre-
feudal world."[68] Drawing on Figgis's determination to "translate the spirit of the old
Irish State into modern conditions,"[69] therefore, he proposed to "look back to the
communal Gaelic State" for a model of how Ireland could thrive as a self-governing
political community in the uncertain future that unfolded in the aftermath of
World War I.[70] The "culminating thesis of my book," he clarified, "is that Sinn
Féin Ireland is the world's working model of a modern Catholic State," one capable
of "displaying the ideals of the Middle Ages in a modern guise."[71] This emphasis on
the "modernity" of the putative independent Irish state obliges contemporary schol-
ars to better understand and more richly contextualize the relativity of modernity
in the intellectual context of interwar Europe, rather than framing such criticisms

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[61]See, for example, Foster, *Modern Ireland*; Richard English, *Irish Freedom: A History of Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 2008).

[62]Aodh de Blácam, "The Gaelic League Yesterday and To-day," *Irish Monthly*, 46/546 (1918), 677–83.

[63]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 23.

[64]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 12.

[65]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 21.

[66]For engagement with Arthur J. Penty's *A Guildsman's Interpretation of History* (London, 1920), and references to works by Orage and Hobson, see De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, xv, 156, 235.

[67]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 197.

[68]Ibid., xiii.

[69]Darrell Figgis, *The Gaelic State in the Past and Future, or "The Crown of a Nation"* (Dublin, 1917), 5. De Blácam also quotes extensively from Figgis's *The Historic Case for Irish Independence* (Dublin, 1918).

[70]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 22.

[71]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, xiv–xvi.

of liberalism and capitalism as a rejection of the modern world *tout court*.[72] For the primary source material makes clear that, in the assessment of many Catholic intellectuals involved in the Irish revolution, the medieval Gaelic order was not a feudal redoubt into which the nation could retreat and shut itself off from "the anarchy of modern times," but a model on which an independent Irish state could fashion its reception of modernity, rendering it appropriate for Irish conditions.[73] "To hold a non-possums, die-hard conservatism at the present stage in the world's affairs would be to court destruction," de Blácam wrote in 1919. "It is for us in Ireland to realise that, unless we are to see our country subjected to a regime of utter nationalisation or collectivism, we must be ready with an alternative plan."[74]

In setting forth his vision of the medieval Gaelic state on which this "alternative plan" would be modeled, de Blácam was influenced profoundly by contemporary Catholic social teaching. In accounting for Gaelic Ireland's capacity to withstand the force of the English invasion and the corrosive influence of "Anglicisation," for instance, he emphasized the "many-headedness … of the Irish constitution" and the island's "want of [political] centralisation," stressing that, "Had the Irish State hung upon central institutions, the destruction thereof would have meant the nation's destruction."[75] This vision of very loose-knit governmental control over a territory "based on self-supporting stateships," each with its "own craftsmen, jurists, physicians and bards: a complete apparatus for independent and varied life," aligned precisely with the principle of subsidiarity endorsed by the interwar papacy.[76] Reacting against the centralizing tendencies of the modern nation-state, the Church promoted throughout the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the idea that political authorities should play only a supporting (or "subsidiary") role in determining the affairs of local communities.[77] This principle was intended to insulate the private, familial sphere against the dictates of the secular state in the manner that the traditional intermediary institutions of medieval societies (like, for instance, trade guilds) were supposed to have done prior to the French Revolution. De Blácam, referencing explicitly Pope Leo XIII's foundational 1891 exposition of subsidiarity, *Rerum Novarum*, rendered this federal approach to governance intrinsic to his model for an independent Irish state, and further Gaelicized the concept

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[72]See, for example, Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, 1982); Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984); Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London, 1995); Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York, 2007).

[73]Aodh de Blácam, *From a Gaelic Outpost* (Dublin, 1921), 94.

[74]Aodh de Blácam, "Letter to the Editor," *Irish Independent*, 10 May 1919, 3.

[75]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 22.

[76]Ibid., 23.

[77]For more on the origins and evolution of the concept of subsidiarity in interwar Catholic thought see Joseph Boyle, "Rerum Novarum (1891)," in Gerard V. Bradley and E. Christian Brugger, eds., *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays* (Cambridge, 2019), 69–89. For more on the institutional Church's response to the challenge of fascism in interwar Europe see, for example, Hubert Wolf, *Pope and Devil: The Vatican's Archives and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA, 2010); John F. Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914–1958* (Oxford, 2014).

by projecting it back onto a mythic image of medieval Ireland.[78] "The reader will be forcibly reminded of Messrs. Orage and Hobson's theories of Guild organisation," de Blácam conceded, but stressed that "this conception has been longer brewing in Ireland than the Guild propaganda has been known in England."[79] Indeed, he even went so far as to assert that "guild socialism and co-operation" had traditionally been "the native order in Ireland, reigning just so long as foreign power was held at bay."[80] In this regard it is significant that de Blácam, like many self-described "conservatives" involved in the Irish revolution, professed greater sympathy for the American republican tradition than he did for its more aggressively secular French equivalent, and praised publicly "the principles of conservatism enunciated by Edmund Burke."[81] "Republicanism, when free from the disproportionate centralisation of France, is congenial to Catholicity," he wrote, adding that "in the new Republics [created across Europe after World War I] we may see hope for the revival of Charlemagne's ideal of a federate community of free peoples."[82] Just over a decade later, he published a lengthy biography of "the founder of Irish republicanism," Theobald Wolfe Tone, with the expressed intention of demonstrating that "Tone never formally denied Christian dogma; God was ever in his thoughts."[83]

De Blácam's vision of very light-touch central-government control over a community of federalized, culturally and economically self-sufficient stateships was nourished by several Catholic intellectuals engaged in the Irish revolution. Following Michael Collins, for instance, many such thinkers held that the "ancient Irish civilization … must provide the keynote for the new."[84] As the academic and politician Michael Tierney put it in a 1920 manifesto for an independent Irish education system, "we must seek for Ireland not only the Gaelic state of the past, but the Christian state of the future," thus rendering the country a "restorer of true Christianity, and with it true democracy and true civilisation to a darkened world."[85] De Blácam similarly conceptualized the coming independent Irish state as a "medieval fragment in the modern world," a repository of classical virtue that might redeem a morally corrupted Europe by pious example.[86] Indeed, he was convinced that because Ireland's "native social order" had "evolved from the Natural Law in the almost-innocent ages of pastoral and early agricultural life," the Gaelic stateships had been organically culturally prepared for the "coming of

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[78]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 38.

[79]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 135.

[80]Aodh de Blácam, "Letter to the Editor," *Irish Independent*, 10 May 1919, 3.

[81]Aodh de Blácam quoted in "Future of Gaelic Movement," *Irish Independent*, 13 June 1923, 8; Seán Donnelly, "Republicanism and Civic Virtue in Treatyite Political Thought, 1921–1923," *Historical Journal* 63/5 (2020), 1274–5.

[82]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 79.

[83]Aodh de Blácam, *The Life Story of Wolfe Tone* (Dublin, 1935), 7.

[84]Michael Collins, *The Path to Freedom* (Dublin, 1922), 55. For analogous depictions of the loose, federal character of government control in medieval Ireland see, for example, Alice Stopford Green, *The Making of Ireland and Its Undoing, 1200–1600* (London, 1909); Green, *Irish Nationality* (New York, 1911); P. S. O'Hegarty, *The Indestructible Nation: A Survey of Irish History from the Invasion* (Dublin, 1918); Eóin MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, 1920).

[85]Michael Tierney, *Education in a Free Ireland* (Dublin, 1920), 97.

[86]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, xiii.

Christianity."[87] Thus, where the "Capitalistic Order" had been imposed on Ireland "violently from without," Catholicism evolved as "a natural organism," rendering his vision of an administration organized on the basis of contemporary Catholic social teaching a simple "return" to the natural conditions of the "Gaelic State."[88] "The Irish people's fidelity to the Church is without parallel in the world," de Blácam declared, stressing that although state administrators would never be "subordinated to churchmen" in a sovereign Irish Republic, "courteous recognition of each other's independence" would ensure that "Catholic philosophy as well as Catholic Faith" would continue to "flourish on Irish soil."[89]

Inevitably, this deeply Catholicized conception of Irishness posed a challenge for de Blácam in respect of accommodating the perspectives of the island's Protestant and Unionist minority—a community, he averred, that would need simply to "accept the fact" that they live "in a mainly non-Protestant country."[90] For although de Blácam was effusive in his praise for the "glorious heritage" of Ulster, and Protestant Irishmen more broadly, he was prone to dismiss Unionism as a species of false consciousness, framing such allegiance as an artificial ideological construct of which its adherents needed only to be disabused in order that the organic "brotherhood of Irishmen" could be reestablished under a unitary state.[91] While this perspective on Ulster Unionism was by no means exceptional among nationalists of the revolutionary generation, the virulence of its expression is, in de Blácam's case, conspicuous owing to his Protestant upbringing and strong familial attachment to the North.[92] Indeed, it may be understood to derive, in part, from his own experience of conversion—a profound personal transformation rooted, the sources suggest, in a visceral distaste for what he perceived as the "unmanly surrender to material interest which made the whole English population Protestant."[93] Nevertheless, de Blácam still went further than many nationalists of his generation in emphasizing the potential compatibility of Protestantism and Irishness. In 1934, for instance, he rebuked Daniel Corkery, author of an influential study of the history of Irish-language poetry in Munster, for overlooking an important "*stratum* of Protestant Gaelicism" that had flourished throughout the seventeenth century, concluding that "to identify *Catholic* with *Gael* … is a sort of Irish Nazi-ism."[94] Later that year, he stated unequivocally that partition could be "corrected only by a settlement through consent" and called upon nationalists "to make any reasonable sacrifice to bring and to hold Ireland together."[95] Therefore de Blácam appeared to retain a belief that because the "whole Ulster separatist movement is founded on

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[87]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 51.

[88]Ibid., 51.

[89]Ibid., 87, 88, 95.

[90]Ibid., 86.

[91]Aodh de Blácam, *The Black North: An Account of the Six Counties of Unrecovered Ireland*, Foreword by Eamon de Valera (Dublin, 1938), 289, 291, 298.

[92]See Patrick Maume, "Anti-Machiavel: Three Ulster Nationalists of the Age of de Valera," *Irish Political Studies*, 14/1 (1999), 43–63.

[93]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 87.

[94]Aodh de Blácam, "The Other Hidden Ireland," *Studies* 23/91 (1934), 452–3, original emphasis. The text to which he is responding is Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin 1924).

[95]Aodh de Blácam, "Some Thoughts on Partition," *Studies*, 23/92 (1934), 561–76, at 561, 576.

religion," as opposed to a separate sense of nationhood, "Ulster Protestants" remained "Gaelic in blood" and could be assimilated successfully to a unified state.[96] Nevertheless, the extent of the political and confessional concessions such a minority might be required to make in order to recover "the historic unity of the Kingdom of Ireland" is never clarified.[97] Furthermore, his portrayal of the "Modernist" Protestantism developed by George Berkley and Jonathan Swift in the eighteenth century as "detached from traditionalism," and therefore inimicable to "the racy old Gaelic culture," indicates that there were clear limits to the form of Protestantism he considered assimilable to a Gaelic state.[98]

In this regard, de Blácam, like many of his nationalist fellow travelers, judged those rural, self-sufficient communities in "the western counties, where the Irish language still predominates," as the most authentic expression of the medieval Gaelic culture that an independent Irish state must aspire to revive—a place where "traces of the life of the stateships" still "linger to this day."[99] He further framed the contemporary co-operative farming movement as "re-establishing" the moral and political economy of the "old stateships" and thus as "advancing the resurgent Gael's cultural and social desires."[100] As Patrick Doyle notes in a valuable recent study of the co-operative movement at the turn of the twentieth century, the phenomenon arose from a widespread sense that Irish farmers were losing ground to international competition. Therefore many elected, through organizations such as Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IOAS), "to combine their resources, talents and ideas to effect an economy of scale that granted them advantageous access to the marketplace."[101] From the establishment of the first co-operative creamery in Drumcollogher, County Limerick, in 1889, the movement peaked at over a thousand societies and 150,000 members by 1920, prompting de Blácam to declare unequivocally that "the future of Ireland lies in Co-operation."[102] Convinced that every serious "Irish social thinker envisages the Gaelic polity as a rural polity," he believed that the independent state should be rooted in communalistic, self-sufficient farming communities, where "the common wealth will pay the common expenses," thus reducing "extreme divergences between classes," and rendering superfluous the impersonal, bureaucratic apparatus of the modern administrative welfare state.[103]

De Blácam thus shared with the Marxist intellectual and revolutionary James Connolly, for instance, the view that, prior to the Norman invasion, an organic "communal or tribal" social order predominated among the Gaelic stateships,[104] and so framed the co-operative farming movement as expressing an authentically

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[96]Ibid., 570.

[97]Ibid., 561.

[98]De Blácam, "The Other Hidden Ireland," 449–50.

[99]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 24.

[100]Ibid., 24–6; see similarly George Russell, *The National Being: Some Thoughts on an Irish Policy* (Dublin, 1916).

[101]Patrick Doyle, *Civilising Rural Ireland: The Co-operative Movement, Development and the Nation-State, 1889–1939* (Manchester, 2019), 2.

[102]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 26.

[103]Ibid., 28.

[104]James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (New York, 1919), 14.

Gaelic system of economic organization, one that might end help "to end the reign of ungoverned individualism" in Europe.[105] But although he, like Connolly, was convinced that the "Capitalistic Order" was "a social experiment" that had "failed" and must, therefore, be "cast aside,"[106] he was equally determined to refute any association of co-operation with "Bolshevism" or revolutionary socialism, which had been established in the years following the Russian Revolution as the Catholic Church's foremost ideological opponent.[107] Indeed, de Blácam was at pains to present Connolly's ideas, and Labour politics more broadly, as "in accord with the Moral Law and with Catholic Social Philosophy,"[108] and he judged it Ireland's "historic mission" to create "a social order" that could "harmonise the communal or social spirit with the rights of individuals and the preservation of private property."[109] In this regard he averred that although "Socialism came to Ireland as it came to all other countries, in great force, in the year after the Armistice," its revolutionary impulses had been "modified by the prevailing Catholic atmosphere until it took the form of vigorous democratic Distributivism," a spirit manifest in the co-operative movement.[110]

IV

In connecting co-operation with distributism as an appropriate Catholic and Gaelic alternative to capitalism, de Blácam made explicit his intellectual debt to Chesterton and Belloc, who had popularized distributist principles in a range of influential publications in the first two decades of the twentieth century.[111] The pair also contributed actively to Irish debates over modernity, not least in the pages of the Jesuit journal *Studies*.[112] Disseminated chiefly through English periodicals, such as *New Age* and *New Witness*, distributism advocated the redistribution of the means of production to as many people as possible.[113] This was intended to redress the bifurcation of the laboring process that was perceived as an inevitable

[105]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 206.

[106]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 43–4.

[107]See, for example, Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade*, 69–120.

[108]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 40.

[109]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 155. In a European context, he was far from alone in undertaking this kind of intellectual work; see, for example, Piotr Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades: Poland, France, and "Revolution," 1891–1956* (New Haven, 2018); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *Left Catholicism, 1943–1955: Catholics and Society in Western Europe at the Point of Liberation* (Leuven, 2001).

[110]Ibid., xvi.

[111]Jay P. Corrin, *G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc: The Battle against Modernity* (Athes, OH, 1981). De Blácam also regularly reviewed and commented on work by Chesterton and Belloc in his capacity as a journalist; see, for example, Aodh de Blácam, "Belloc Hammers H. G. Wells," *Irish Independent*, 29 Nov. 1926, 4; de Blácam, "'G.K.C' Tells His Own Story," *Irish Press*, 9 Nov. 1936, 8.

[112]See, for example, Hilaire Belloc, "On Progress," *Studies* 9/36 (1920), 497–511; G. K. Chesterton, "The Mission of Ireland," *Studies* 21/83 (1932), 374–84; Chesterton, *Irish Impressions* (London, 1919); Chesterton, *Christendom in Dublin: Personal Impressions of the 31st Eucharistic Congress in Dublin 1932* (London, 1933). Newspaper reports also attest to the regularity with which the pair contributed to public lecture events in Ireland; see, for example, "Mr Belloc's Visit," *Freeman's Journal*, 22 May 1915, 8; "Lecture by Mister Hilaire Belloc," *Irish Independent*, 15 Dec. 1926, 8; "Mr G. K. Chesterton in Ireland," *Irish Independent*, 23 Sept. 1918, 2; "G. K. Chesterton's Visit," *Evening Herald*, 5 April 1928, 6.

[113]Jay P. Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy* (Notre Dame, 2002), 15–16.

outcome of the capitalist wage system and to create "a society in which the determinant mass of families are owners of capital and of land" and are, therefore, capable of living independent of any centralized state apparatus.[114] As de Blácam put it, "Gaelic society was Distributist. That is to say, it rested on widely distributed private property of land."[115] Regarding the capitalist wage system as corruptive of the innate moral dignity associated with self-sufficiency, distributists reacted as viscerally against the commodification of labor as they did against social inequality and regarded the medieval guildsman as freer than the capitalist "wage slave" precisely because his labor was not, in itself, a commodity. Therefore any socialist regime that aspired merely to improve the material conditions of the working class, or provide greater security of employment to wage earners, remained, in Belloc's analysis, a "servile state," precisely because the workers would still be alienated from the fruits of their labor owing the endurance of the wage system.[116]

Echoing this perspective, de Blácam avowed that, under an authentically Gaelic and Catholic mode of distributist economy, "workers must be their own capitalists," and the "diffusion of small private property, which will follow a widespread stake in the land, will increase stability, personal independence and good citizenship."[117] Indeed, as much as de Blácam loathed the economic inequality he perceived as endemic to capitalist societies, he ultimately considered that the instability of interwar Europe arose principally from a "spiritual sickness" connected with the "collapse of religion as a factor in modern civilization," more than from simple material inequality.[118] Therefore he judged that "no economic change can change society unless it involves a psychological change. The disease is of the spirit."[119] In this regard, de Blácam's work, like that of Patrick Pearse, for instance, may be understood productively in the context of a broader anti-materialist turn in European thought from the later nineteenth century, one that endorsed many traditional socialist critiques of liberalism and capitalism but emphasized nationalism over the class struggle as the animating spirit of history.[120] Indeed, de Blácam delighted in portraying Irish history, from the period of the Reformation onwards, as the story of a nation's refusal to "surrender to material interest," and quipped that his countrymen's enduring loyalty to the Catholic Church must "puzzle the materialist philosopher, who professes to see nothing in history but the play of economic forces."[121]

Again, here de Blácam's proscriptions for the material inequalities and spiritual anomie ailing modern society are consonant with the dominant trends of Catholic political theory as it evolved in the 1920s. Since at least the 1840s, when Pope Pius

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[114]Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (London: T. N. Foulis, 1912), 62.

[115]Aodh de Blácam, "No Property, No Freedom: The Chesterton–Belloc Theory Discussed by 'Rerum Novarum'," *Irish Press*, 6 July 1936, 8.

[116]Tom Villis, *Reaction and the Avant-Garde: The Revolt against Liberal Democracy in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 2006), 41–72.

[117]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 29, 35.

[118]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 226–7.

[119]Ibid., 228.

[120]For context see Tom Villis, *British Catholics and Fascism: Religious Identity and Political Extremism between the Wars* (Basingstoke, 2013), 77–98.

[121]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 87.

IX condemned "communism and socialism" as diffusing doctrines in two encyclicals, *Qui Pluribus* (1846) and *Quibus, Quantisque* (1849), Catholic intellectuals had been concerned to formulate a social and economic system capable of counterbalancing the excesses of liberal capitalism on the one hand and state socialism on the other. While a wide variety of prospective solutions were promulgated among the lay intelligentsia throughout the later nineteenth century, by the 1890s the Church leadership had substantially settled upon a set of organizing principles, traceable to Pius IX's restoration of Rome's medieval trade guilds (*corporazioni*), that is referred to generically as "corporatism."[122] In its most basic form, corporatism aspired to solve what the magisterium had come to refer to as the "social question" by resurrecting organizations akin to "the ancient working-men's guilds [that] were abolished in the last century" and by providing the state with an enhanced, structured role in mediating disputes between workers and employers.[123] Judging competition for material wealth as spiritually demeaning, corporatist theorists generally held that business, labor, and the state should cooperate to set quotas, prices, and wages throughout designated, vertically connected sectors of the economy, referred to commonly as "associations" or "corporations."[124] This enhanced model of cooperation was intended, principally, to salve the endemic labor unrest that engulfed societies across Europe in the decades following World War I, thus stemming the cognate proliferation of socialist ideas and transnational labor organizing.

Furthermore, concerned at the growing instability of liberal democracies in the wake of the Great War, many Catholic intellectuals and politicians applied similar principles to the issue of political representation. Instead of relying upon the populist caprice of democratic parliaments, the argument went, the interests of the community could be expressed most effectively through the institution of organized, hierarchical vocational panels, with representatives deriving legitimacy from their technical expertise, rather than from popular democratic endorsement. As António Costa Pinto notes, this insight helped to precipitate a "corporatist wave" across Europe during the interwar years, beginning with the regimes of Sidónio Pais in Portugal (1917–18), General Primo de Rivera in Spain (1923–31) and Benito Mussolini in Italy (1922–43), and continuing through the Austrian *Ständestaat* under Engelbert Dollfuss and Kurt Schuschnigg (1933–8), the Portuguese *Estadio Novo* under António de Oliveira Salazar (1933–74) and the Francisco Franco administration in Spain (1939–75).[125] Institutionally, of course, corporatist political theories were expressed in strikingly diverse ways.[126] It must

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[122]Stefano Solari, "The Corporative Third Way in Social Catholicism (1830 to 1918)," *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 17/1 (2010), 87–113.

[123]Pope Pius IX, *Rerum Novarum* (15 May 1891), Section 3, at www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html.

[124]Antonio Costa Pinto, "Fascism, Corporatism and the Crafting of Authoritarian Institutions in Inter-war European Dictatorships," in António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis, eds., *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Basingstoke, 2014), 87–120; Philip Morgan, "Corporatism and the Economic Order," in R. J. B. Bosworth, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (Oxford, 2009), 150–65.

[125]António Costa Pinto, ed., *Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe* (London, 2017).

[126]See, for example, P. J. Williamson, *Varieties of Corporatism: A Conceptual Discussion* (Cambridge, 1985).

also be acknowledged that many Catholic supporters of corporatist political principles were, in practice, critical of their intensely statist application by authoritarian governments.[127] However, de Blácam, writing before Mussolini's March on Rome and the subsequent spread of authoritarian corporatism across much of Europe, was as drawn to the political expression of corporatist principles as he was to their social application in the form of distributism and agricultural co-operation. Indeed, he followed the leading distributists of the period in regarding parliamentarianism as an inadequate an inefficient means of representing the will of the community politically.[128] As early as 1918, for instance, he labeled it "absurd that an economic theory and a sectarian problem should be cast for with the one vote, and decided by the one body of men, instead of by separate expert institutions," averring that "Ireland has a different conception of the right way to conduct a state."[129]

De Blácam expanded upon this alternative conception in *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, placing a heavy emphasis on the reorganization of electoral constituencies along vocational lines, rather than advocating the abandonment of democracy as a system for selecting representatives. "That parliamentary government, as we have known it, is played out, seems to be agreed by all advanced political thinkers," de Blácam wrote, citing "the Soviet movement in Russia, the Councils' Revolt in Germany and the advocacy of vocational representation by Italian Catholic reformers" as evidence of the parliamentary model's inevitable supersession.[130] He judged it "unnatural for a Parliament to concern itself, as it must do under the modern regime, with problems of wages, hours, cattle restrictions, etc., that are the affair of experts,"[131] and held that because the traditional "geographical constituency" is "a purely accidental or fortuitous grouping of individuals," the organization of electors on the basis of economic activity, or "by membership of a single distributive institution," would enhance democracy by ensuring that officials represented "a real, not a factitious, community."[132] Drawing on George Young's account of the organization of vocational councils in interwar Germany, he suggested that "[i]nstead of voting as at present in an artificial group, which has no continuing life of its own, the individual is to make his wishes felt, under the new system, by voting in some existing, natural group—an industrial union or a co-operative society in which he can be in constant touch with his representative."[133] "Occupational association," de Blácam argued, is "the truest medium of group opinion,"[134] for by passing "administration over to the organisations in which practical workers have already won their way, the constitution will ensure that administration will automatically rest with men of merit."[135] "In Ireland," he

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[127]John Pollard, "Corporatism and Political Catholicism: The Impact of Catholic Corporatism in Inter-war Europe," in Pinto, *Corporatism and Fascism*, 50–51.

[128]In this regard he was influenced heavily by Hilaire Belloc and Cecil Chesterton, *The Party System* (London, 1911).

[129]De Blácam, *Towards the Republic*, 65.

[130]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 133.

[131]Ibid., 143.

[132]Ibid., 145.

[133]Ibid., 133; George Young, *The New Germany* (London, 1920), 217.

[134]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 133.

[135]Ibid., 140.

concluded, "we expect to see the external or central state dissolved, absorbed and assimilated, as the powers engrossed by the parliamentary form of government are assumed by the natural institutions of society."[136] The result would be not some "Kropotkinesque anarchism," but "the real disappearance of the bourgeois state felt after by men like Lenin … genuine self-government, genuine democracy in the original meaning of the word."[137] While de Blácam never proffered a concrete definition of such "genuine democracy," his understanding of the term appeared to share many characteristics with the Rousseauist tradition of the General Will favoured by Belloc and Chesterton, and thus arguably had the potential to trend in a crudely majoritarian direction.[138]

De Blácam, it must be stressed, was far from alone in looking to papal teaching and institutional examples provided by other Catholic countries in seeking to formulate a distinctly Gaelic alternative to "the English parliamentary model."[139] Indeed, Article 45 of the 1922 Free State Constitution provided explicitly for "the establishment of Functional or Vocational Councils representing branches of the social and economic life of the Nation,"[140] and Catholic thinkers like the independent parliamentarian Darrell Figgis and the University College Cork professor Alfred O'Rahilly invested a great deal of professional and intellectual energy in lobbying for the institution of such structures.[141] But although the Cumann na nGaedheal administration that governed the Free State from 1922 until 1932 never implemented vocational models of representation, corporatist ideas, particularly those expressed in Pope Pius XI's seminal 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, provided a vital source of inspiration underlying the party's eventual merger with the paramilitary Blueshirt movement and the National Centre Party to form Fine Gael in 1933.[142] Furthermore, in response to extensive ecclesiastical, academic, and commercial lobbying, vocational bodies and panels formed an intrinsic element of the structure and operation of the reformed Seanad (the upper chamber of the Irish parliament) that was instituted by Eamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil government following the ratification of Bunreacht na hÉireann, the second constitution of the Irish Free State, in 1937.[143] This circumstance underlines the imperative that historians distinguish carefully between the heterodox modalities of corporatist thought that percolated among Catholic intellectuals during the interwar period and interrogate critically any casual conflation of corporatist theories with antidemocratic or fascist sentiments. In addition to providing for vocational representation in the

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[136]Ibid., 140.

[137]Ibid., 141.

[138]Villis, *British Catholics and Fascism*, 103.

[139]De Blácam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, 133. See, for example, Don O'Leary, *Vocationalism and Social Catholicism in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000).

[140]Constitution of the Irish Free State (Saorstát Eireann) Act, 1922, at www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1922/act/1/enacted/en/print.html.

[141]See Martin O'Donoghue, "'As Nearly Subservient' as It Could Be? Vocationalism and Senatorial Speaking Behaviour in the Irish Senate 1938–45," *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 36/2 (2016), 211–31.

[142]Mike Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish Politics* (Dublin, 1997); Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: A Self-Made Hero* (Oxford, 2005).

[143]See, for example, Donal K. Coffey, *Drafting the Irish Constitution, 1935–1937: Transnational Influences in Interwar Europe* (London, 2018).

Seanad, for instance, the Preamble to Bunreacht na hÉireann recognized explicitly the role of government in securing "the dignity and freedom of the individual" and has thus been attributed by several scholars with anticipating the reconciliation of Catholic social theory to democracy and religious pluralism that obtained internationally after World War II.[144]

Similarly, although de Blácam was drawn to vocational models of political representation and, like many Irish Catholics, praised aspects of the regimes administered by Mussolini, Dollfuss, Franco, and Salazar,[145] he never advocated for the abandonment of democracy or representative government and was an ardent supporter of one of the few surviving democratic administrations in 1930s Europe, having opposed the Blueshirt movement. De Blácam's openness to socialist ideals undoubtedly hardened as the interwar period progressed and, by the time the Spanish Civil War erupted in 1936, he was unequivocal that "Spain is fighting for the cause of all Christendom … [against] the atheistic materialism of Moscow."[146] But even in endorsing the Nationalist offensive, he was unequivocal that the "revolt" which occasioned the conflict "was 'Fascist' only in a sense given to the term by Communists, who use it to embrace all groups opposed to them, and have used it even of Mr. de Valera's Government."[147] In explicating this perspective, de Blácam provided valuable clarity regarding his perception of the complex contemporary relation of Catholic corporatist structures to fascism, which he framed as specific to the Italian context:

> The declaration of Nationalist generals that a "corporative State" will be set up does not imply Fascism but the adoption of an alternative to the English parliamentary system which has been advocated by men, including Irish writers for nearly twenty years, who are against Fascism. An alternative to the English parliamentary system need not be less democratic; especially when we consider the Belloc–Chesterton criticism of Parliament. This alternative system may be allied to Fascism, as in Italy, or may take a form that is opposed to Fascism, as in Portugal.[148]

In de Blácam's assessment, therefore, corporatist modes of political representation provided a more authentically Catholic and more democratic alternative to Westminster-style parliamentarianism and needed to be distinguished conceptually from contemporary invocations of the word "fascism" as a term of partisan political invective. Indeed, he even went so far as to indicate a preference for Salazar's *Estadio Novo* over Mussolini's Fascist state on the basis that it is more "closely in accord with the ideals of the most authoritative Catholic teachers."[149] The following

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[144]See, for example, Leonard Francis Taylor, *Catholic Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge, 2020), 218–24; for the broader European context see also Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia, 2015); Marco Duranti, *The Conservative Human Rights Revolution: European Identity, Transnational Politics, and the Origins of the European Convention* (New York, 2017); Sarah Shortall and Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, eds., *Christianity and Human Rights Reconsidered* (Cambridge, 2020).

[145]See, for example, Aodh de Blácam, *Gaelic Literature Surveyed* (Dublin, 1929), 23.

[146]Aodh de Blácam, *For God and Spain: The Truth about the Spanish Civil War* (Dublin, 1936), 2.

[147]Aodh De Blácam, 'Can Ireland Help Spain?', *Irish Monthly*, 64/760 (1936), 645–51, at 649.

[148]Ibid., 650.

[149]Ibid.

year he warned that "under a dictator, Italy is always in danger that a less orthodox dictator will arise and use his unique power to give a disastrous twist to the whole nation," adding that the same has already "happened in Germany, where a once Catholic man has become a dictator and has given free rein to the most dangerous anti-Christian policies that are known anywhere, save in Russia and Mexico."[150] It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that de Blácam was not among the fringe group of his fellow Catholic and nationalist countrymen who endorsed the Axis powers during the Second World War, recoiling at the aggressively secular, racist, and paganistic tendencies manifest in German National Socialism.[151] "The Nazis are the men of iron, deaf to song, careless of thought, scorners of faith, whose grim power is typical of all civilisations in their final stage," he wrote within two years of Adolf Hitler's accession to power. Echoing the emerging Catholic critique of totalitarian systems of government, he concluded, "Nazism and Communism both are present-day forms of Caesar-worship."[152] Also noteworthy in this regard is the fact that de Blácam tended to eschew the anti-Semitism expressed so ubiquitously by Catholics and nationalists across Europe during the period. In a rare instance of criticism aimed at Chesterton and Belloc, for instance, he bemoaned how "with all the world loud with misery and smoking with desolation the Chesterbellocites (whom usually I so much admire) have nothing to offer today as a remedy save the pillorying of an unfortunate exile race who exert no consistent influence on the politics of England."[153]

Nevertheless, de Blácam was, by the later 1930s, as vociferous as any of his countrymen in demanding the censorship of books, newspapers, and films to safeguard Ireland's traditional Catholic morality, believing that "the cinema has done more harm in twenty years than the Penal Laws did in 200 years."[154] It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that he played an influential role in the drafting of Eamon de Valera's oft-cited 1943 St Patrick's Day address, "The Ireland That We Dreamed Of," a speech held commonly to symbolize the extent to which the Gaelic–Catholic idealism of the revolutionary generation belied the harsh material realities of daily life for many in the Free State.[155] In this regard it is striking that, in the twilight of his life, as an adviser to the interparty government's Commission on Emigration, de Blácam proposed a complete ban on female emigration as a means of halting rural depopulation, and thus preserving the kind of self-sufficient, rural society sought by so many Catholic intellectuals engaged with the Irish revolution.[156] Furthermore, in an apparent departure from the primarily cultural

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[150]Aodh de Blácam, "The Catholic Nations and Spain," *Irish Press*, 24 February 1937, 8.

[151]R. M. Douglas, *Architects of the Resurrection: Ailtirí na hAiséirghe and the Fascist "New Order" in Ireland* (Manchester, 2009).

[152]De Blácam, "Review: The Decline of the West by O. Spengler," 540, 543. For context see James Chappel, "The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe," *Modern Intellectual History* 8/3 (2011), 561–90.

[153]Aodh de Blácam, "The Jews Scapegoats Now," *Sunday Independent*, 15 Jan. 1922, 3; see also Colum Kenny, *The Enigma of Arthur Griffith: "Father of Us All"* (Dublin, 2020), 179–80.

[154]"Doing More Harm than Penal Laws," *Ulster Herald*, 23 April 1938, 2.

[155]See, for example, Ronan Fanning, *Éamon de Valera: A Will to Power* (London, 2015), 199–224.

[156]Mary Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1920–73* (Madison, 2006), 40, 167–72. That in arguing this position de Blácam evoked the spectre of Irish women entering "a

conception of nationhood advocated in his earlier work, de Blácam, by 1950, tended to frame the task of "stemming rural depopulation" as a means of securing the nation's "racial future," noting that "Ireland" is the "one white country [in the world] in which population has declined in recent times."[157] While not indicative of any fundamental shift in political outlook, the increased willingness to have recourse to coercion that marked de Blácam's later-life policy proscriptions may be understood to belie a tacit awareness that the Free State never succeeded in realizing the kind of neo-medieval society that its most idealistic architects had envisaged.

V

This analysis of the political thought of one significantly overlooked member of Ireland's revolutionary generation, it is hoped, might demonstrate to scholars the value of a contextualist approach in recovering the heterodox nexus of perspectives that conditioned the ideological texture of both the Irish revolution and the independent state that evolved in its aftermath. In addition to demonstrating the vibrancy of Catholic intellectual life in Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century, and the richness and range of the transnational ideological debates in which engaged actors participated, de Blácam's output gives us cause to ponder the rather procrustean, *ex post facto* ideological distinctions that recent scholarship has erected between pro-Treaty Sinn Féin on the one hand and their anti-Treaty opponents on the other. While the contributions of scholars such as John Regan, Bill Kissane, and Gavin M. Foster have usefully complicated reductive prior characterizations of the Civil War as a straightforward contest over the principle of majority rule, the suggestion that the bifurcation of revolutionary Sinn Féin can be mapped according to distinctions in social class and corresponding divergences in attitudes towards social inequality occludes the overwhelming ideological congruence that obtained between the warring factions.[158] Brian Hanley has already demonstrated that, in terms of economic background, there was far more that united pro and anti-Treaty Sinn Féin than separated them.[159] Similarly, in respect of political ideas, the deeply Catholicized, nationalist perspectives expressed by a prominent anti-Treaty polemicist, such as de Blácam, differ in substance little from those articulated by Cumann na nGaedheal stalwarts, such as W. T. Cosgrave and Kevin O'Higgins, as well as Blueshirt intellectuals such as Professors Michael Tierney and Alfred O'Rahilly, both of whom represented Cumann na nGaedheal in the Dáil.

Jewman's house in the English slums" indicates that he grew more disposed towards invoking anti-Semitic tropes in later life.

[157]Aodh de Blácam, "Emigration: The Witness of Geography," *Studies* 39/155 (1950), 279–88, at 280, 288.

[158]Regan, *The Irish Counter-revolution*; Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War*; Gavin M. Foster, *The Irish Civil War and Society: Politics, Class, and Conflict* (London, 2015).

[159]Brian Hanley, "'Merely Tuppence Half-Penny Looking Down on Tuppence'? Class, the Second Dáil and Irish Republicanism," in Mícheál Ó Fathartaigh and Liam Weeks, eds., *The Treaty: Debating and Establishing Irish Independence* (Dublin, 2018), 90–112.

Ultimately, the split in Sinn Féin occasioned by the Dáil's decision to ratify the Treaty owed to a disagreement over strategy far more than contrasting visions regarding the subsequent organization of Irish politics, economy, and society. De Blácam's enduring ideological closeness to many senior Treatyite intellectuals throughout the interwar period illustrates vividly the cleavages' shared intellectual pedigree. For like figures such as Collins, O'Rahilly, and Tierney, de Blácam considered the creation of a neo-medieval Gaelic state, rooted in Catholic political theory, not as a rejection of modernity, but as a distinctly Irish experiment in shaping modern conditions to accord with national tastes. In this regard, his outlook was typical of the radical intellectual experimentation that predominated among Catholic thinkers in the uncertain future that evolved in the wake of World War I, and it is important that the political thought of the Irish revolution and its aftermath begins to be understood in this broader context. But while de Blácam's work may be considered productively as part of the same tradition of ultranationalist, antiliberal, and antimaterialist thought that produced Continental fascism, his ultimate skepticism of Mussolini's regime, and visceral rejection of German National Socialism, remind us that intellectual trajectories are never predetermined and that contemporary thinkers can absorb many of the same influences and respond to many of the same events while arriving at markedly different political conclusions.[160] In seeking to reconstruct the protean intellectual landscape that produced the Irish Free State, it is essential that we, as historians, remain cognizant of such contingency and account for the long afterlife of Catholic and corporatist ideas in shaping the policies of Christian Democratic parties across Europe after World War II.[161]

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[160]One need only observe the parallels between de Blácam's early writings and those of the Blueshirt intellectual Michael Tierney for evidence of this circumstance. See Seán Donnelly, "Michael Tierney and the Intellectual Origins of Blueshirtism, 1920–1938," *Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 10/1 (2021), 85–107.

[161]See, for example, Philippe C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?", *Review of Politics* 36/1 (1974), 85–131; Émile Perreau-Saussine, *Catholicism and Democracy: An Essay in the History of Political Thought*, trans. Richard Rex (Princeton, 2012); Maria Mitchell, *The Origins of Christian Democracy: Politics and Confession in Modern Germany* (Ann Arbor, 2012); Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, *What Is Christian Democracy? Politics, Religion, and Ideology* (Cambridge, 2019); Martin Conway, *Western Europe's Democratic Age: 1945–1968* (Princeton, 2022).