

WILL THE INWARD LIGHT GO OUT IN IRELAND?¹

I

Introduction

Friends in Ireland have been concerned about the decline in their numbers for some time.² As one explores their experience, the reasons for this concern become readily apparent. The loss in numbers and meetings is, however, uneven. Some meetings have disappeared; others have declined and a few are growing. Early this century there were 11 monthly meetings and 36 preparative meetings. Now, in spite of the addition of two meetings in Ulster and one in Leinster, there are only five monthly meetings and 20 preparative meetings. Names of meetings like Bray, Carlow, Clara, Maghaberry, Moate, Mountmellick, Rathangan, Rathmines, Ross, Tullamore, Wexford, Wicklow, and others are now memories. Others, like Limerick, that were once monthly meetings, no longer take on that level of responsibility. Further, while one monthly meeting has seven particular meetings for worship, another can only claim one. Monthly meeting membership numbers now vary from more than 500, to as few as 25.

The quinquennial average membership in Ireland Yearly Meeting was 2574 for the 1897-1901 quinquennium. That was the membership peak for the last part of the nineteenth century. From that peak the number of Friends in Ireland has been in almost constant decline. In 1989 the number stood at 1672. Between 1911 and 1989 Irish Friends registered 861 births, and 2365 deaths. There were 226 marriages between Friends and 1160 Friends chose to marry non-Friends. If all the Irish Friends who married out had been disowned, and if nobody in Ireland had asked to join the Society of Friends, then Irish Friends would owe the world about 260 people. We can, therefore, give thanks for those who did not leave, were not disowned and for those who chose to join Friends.

Friends in the Republic are a small minority of the small non-Catholic part of the population. The non-Catholic minority has declined by about two thirds since Independence.³ In Northern Ireland, some Friends see themselves neither as a part of the Protestant majority, nor of the Catholic minority. However, in many ways they live as if they were a small part of the Protestant majority. The northern Protestant

majority, as in the South, is also declining in numbers.⁴ In this paper I will describe the decline in the number of Friends in Ireland Yearly Meeting. The reasons for and some of the consequences of the decline will also be described.

II

Background

In 1911, the date of the last census before Independence, 90 per cent of the people in what became the Republic were Roman Catholics. In a few years that proportion had grown to about 94 per cent where it has remained. Between 1911 and 1961 there was a steady loss of people largely as a result of emigration.⁵ The net loss due to migration has varied, going as high as 46,000 per year. Only during the period between 1971 and 1976 was there a net return to Ireland. By 1981 there were more Roman Catholics than at any time before.

In contrast, the members of "other stated religions" declined precipitously. Between 1911 and 1926, their numbers declined by about a third. Since 1926, a further loss has brought them down to about 40 per cent of what they were before Independence. The declines were greater among the larger Protestant Churches than among the smaller groups. By 1981 the three largest denominations had been reduced to about one third the number they had started with in 1911. They, along with Friends, have had a lower birth-rate than have Catholics.⁶ The decline is a reflection of these two variables, see table 1 below.

All the non-Catholic groups in the Republic have had the same experience. They have closed churches and have seen many of their ministers forced to serve more than one congregation. Methodists have combined forces with Presbyterians in some towns to share churches and ministers. Between 1971 and 1981 there was a net return of population. Even then the number of Anglicans and Presbyterians continued to decline. The much smaller Methodist Church just held its own.

In contrast, the number of people who claimed no religion has increased markedly. In 1961 there were 6732 people who claimed no religion. This number grew to 110,548 in 1981. Although the number is small, it comes at a time of decline in the Republic's churches. If we assume that the rate of growth of this group has been sustained since 1981, the number of unchurched would now be expected to be half as large again as the non-Catholic minority. The erosion will probably show up in the numbers of all religious bodies, including the majority Roman Catholics, in the 1991 census.

Table 1
Religious composition in Ireland
1911 to 1981

Year	Total populat. (X1000)	Roman Cath. num. (X1000)	Cath. %	Other Stated religions number	Stated %	No religion identif.	No info. suppl.	NR+NI %
1911	3,140	2,813	89.6	315,266	10.0	11,913*		.4
1926	2,972	2,751	92.6	210,993	7.1	9,730*		.3
1936	2,968	2,774	93.5	184,495	6.2	8,005*		.3
1946	2,955	2,786	94.3	160,961	5.4	8,113*		.3
1961	2,818	2,673	94.9	144,868	5.1	1,107	5,625	.2
1971	2,978	2,796	93.9	128,318	4.3	7,616	46,648	1.8
1981	3,443	3,204	93.1	128,481	3.7	39,572	70,976	3.2

Note: * These figures include people who claimed: "other stated religions" that were not Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist or Jewish; those who claimed "no religion"; and those for whom no information was supplied. From the census in 1961, these categories were separated.

In Northern Ireland, membership in the Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist churches grew in tandem with the population between 1911 and 1961. After 1961, while population numbers continued to increase, the largest churches began to decline. The provincial decline did not show up in the census until ten years later. By 1981 there are fewer members in the major denominations in Northern Ireland than at any time. The Methodists, although declining, still had more members than they did in 1911. In contrast, membership in other religions has tripled. This group includes the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster. As in the Republic, the number of people who refused to identify themselves with any religious group has increased, see table 2.

Table 2
Religious Composition in Northern Ireland
1911 to 1981

Year	Popula.	R. Cath.	C of I.	Presb.	Method.	Free Presb.	O.ReIn.	Not Stated
1911	1,250,531	430,161	327,076	395,039	46,562		49,207	2,486
1926	1,256,561	420,428	338,722	393,374	49,556		52,177	2,304
1937	1,279,741	428,290	345,474	390,931	55,131		57,541	2,374
1951	1,370,921	471,460	353,245	410,215	66,639		63,497	5,865

Table 2 continued.

Year	Popula.	R. Cath.	C of I.	Presb.	Method.	Free Presb.	O.ReIn.	Not Stated
1961	1,425,042	497,547	344,800	413,113	71,865		71,299	26,418
1971	1,519,640	477,921	334,318	405,717	71,245	7337	87,938	142,511
1981	1,481,959	414,532	281,472	339,818	58,731	9621	112,822	274,584

- Note: 1. Other Religions includes the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster.
 2. These data were extracted from census figures published by HM Stationery Office.

Three reasons can be advanced for the decline in both the Protestant majority and Catholic minority in the North. First, a small part of the loss is produced by the decline in the population. Second, the number of people who belong to "other small religions" had increased. Third, and perhaps most significantly, is the increase in people who claim no religion at all. Looking at the details, between 1961 and 1981 the number of people who claim to belong to a religion *other than* the large four increased by 58 per cent, from 71, 299 to 112, 822. The large four are the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists.

Uniform growth cannot be assumed for the smaller churches. Some grew while others did not. All of the smaller religious bodies with a long history have declined. Among them is the Society of Friends. Their decline is disguised by growth in two other groups of small churches. One is a group of churches that have non-Irish identities. They include all the Eastern churches, the Church of England and the Episcopal Church of Scotland. The other small churches that grew provide certainty in theology, in politics, or in both. The largest is the Revd. Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster. It, like the other Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, has grown.

There are several reasons for the decline of the larger denominations. Emigration, declining birth rates and the increase in those people who refused to state their religion to the census taker provide the basic explanation. The "no answers" grew from 26,418 in 1961 to 274,584 in 1981. Another 22,403 people provided ambiguous answers to the question. These represent an increased level of secularization similar to that found in other parts of Great Britain, North America, and Western Europe.

III

Changes in Ireland Yearly Meeting

The membership of Ireland Yearly Meeting has been drifting downward from the turn of the century. The decline has been steady with few interruptions. There was a flattening of the decline around

World War II. However, this did little to change the trend. In contrast to the other non-Catholic groups in the Republic, Friends have not declined as much as did the other minority religious groups. Nevertheless, Friends in the Republic are now about 58 per cent of the number they were in 1910, see table 3.

Table 3
Ireland Yearly Meeting
Membership Statistics 1910 to 1988

Year	No*	Leinster Q M						Munster Q M						Ulster Q M							
		B	D	Trans.	Marry	No.		B	D	Trans.	Marry	No.		B	D	Trans.	Marry	No.			
		in	out	in	out			in	out	in	out			in	out	in	out				
1910	963	7	13	20	18	4	7	321	6	6	7	5	0	1	1156	5	4	28	42	5	1
1911	959	4	15	25	22	3	4	323	1	5	8	11	0	0	1123	9	16	51	36	6	9
1912	951	8	18	15	33	6	7	316	4	4	6	13	0	0	1131	2	13	31	34	4	8
1913	923	9	17	14	31	3	5	309	1	4	4	6	1	0	1117	11	17	53	40	6	1
1914	898	6	11	12	12	2	5	304	4	8	8	4	0	0	1124	6	13	46	52	3	0
1915	893	4	17	24	6	3	9	304	1	7	5	2	0	1	1111	15	13	21	23	4	5
1916	898	1	16	29	12	4	11	301	0	4	0	1	0	1	1111	8	13	48	18	1	0
1917	900	4	16	8	17	4	7	297	3	6	2	4	1	0	1136	13	22	31	18	3	3
1918	880	2	12	15	7	2	3	292	2	7	1	4	0	5	1140	9	18	28	14	3	0
1919	879	5	17	27	22	5	5	284	2	8	6	16	0	3	1145	13	21	19	10	0	8
1920	873	10	16	13	15	0	10	268	1	3	4	2	1	3	1146	8	20	26	12	0	1
1921	865	6	11	10	9	0	8	268	0	2	3	10	0	1	1148	12	17	37	18	1	5
1922	861	4	16	11	16	0	2	259	2	8	11	7	0	1	1162	7	21	51	24	1	12
1923	844	3	11	21	15	2	6	256	1	5	1	6	0	3	1175	14	17	40	29	2	3
1924	842	3	21	17	16	2	6	247	0	11	6	8	0	3	1183	4	22	37	26	2	3
1925	823	1	16	12	20	2	3	234	2	5	4	2	0	1	1176	5	26	35	25	2	0
1926	800	1	13	15	6	1	2	233	0	5	5	7	0	4	1165	11	13	24	15	2	12
1927	797	2	16	22	7	4	2	226	1	5	10	9	4	0	1172	6	14	16	4	0	7
1928	798	3	10	13	8	0	6	223	3	3	6	4	0	3	1176	8	17	21	30	2	15
1929	796	5	16	6	19	0	7	225	1	5	3	8	0	1	1158	15	15	21	23	1	11
1930	772	1	18	18	19	2	8	216	0	1	2	5	1	1	1156	9	10	21	12	0	8
1931	754	3	15	15	10	0	2	212	1	1	3	4	0	0	1163	11	17	20	13	1	7
1932	747	2	12	10	7	0	4	211	0	7	2	7	0	0	1164	7	16	21	7	3	8
1933	740	0	23	29	29	3	2	199	2	4	4	1	1	0	1169	5	14	21	10	0	7
1934	717	1	10	10	12	2	5	200	0	3	5	7	0	0	1171	4	14	22	11	2	10
1935	706	2	11	11	12	2	10	195	0	3	2	8	0	1	1172	7	19	33	22	1	3
1936	696	4	10	16	8	3	7	186	3	6	5	1	0	2	1171	7	19	31	25	0	8
1937	698	4	14	16	10	2	5	187	1	4	5	9	0	1	1165	3	18	37	10	2	7
1938	694	2	7	7	5	1	6	180	0	4	3	7	0	0	1178	11	16	36	28	2	7
1939	691	4	7	11	8	4	7	172	0	2	12	4	0	3	1181	9	18	16	12	0	11

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Table 3 continued

Year	No*	Leinster Q M						Munster Q M						Ulster Q M							
		B	D	Trans.	Marry	No.		B	D	Trans.	Marry	No.	B	D	Trans.	Marry	No.				
		in	out	in	out		in	out	in	out		in	out	in	out	in	out				
1940	691	3	19	20	3	3	6	178	0	6	8	3	1	3	1176	1	23	24	13	3	11
1941	692	5	13	20	1	1	8	177	1	5	0	7	0	0	1165	5	23	12	6	5	21
1942	703	1	6	11	5	2	6	166	0	3	4	4	0	1	1153	3	16	20	6	4	9
1943	704	8	13	13	7	3	9	163	2	4	4	2	0	1	1154	6	22	12	15	2	10
1944	705	2	14	18	12	1	5	163	2	3	2	4	1	2	1135	7	14	14	11	2	26
1945	699	4	10	14	8	5	7	160	1	9	4	2	0	3	1131	8	15	12	11	3	17
1946	699	3	14	10	8	1	6	154	2	5	3	4	1	0	1127	6	14	37	28	1	12
1947	690	6	15	8	10	2	9	150	2	3	1	0	0	0	1128	10	20	17	8	3	12
1948	681	2	8	21	8	4	3	149	3	3	4	7	0	2	1127	6	16	35	26	0	14
1949	688	4	17	20	12	2	9	146	1	0	8	4	0	0	1126	15	12	13	21	0	17
1950	683	6	12	3	4	0	10	151	2	4	1	0	0	0	1130	9	11	29	6	0	5
1951	677	5	15	14	2	0	12	150	0	3	1	2	0	0	1151	9	14	30	11	3	10
1952	679	4	12	10	9	1	6	146	2	1	2	1	0	0	1165	13	13	29	28	1	15
1953	673	6	11	21	9	0	5	148	1	4	3	0	0	2	1166	11	7	11	5	3	16
1954	679	2	12	18	1	0	3	148	0	1	3	6	0	0	1176	11	9	11	10	0	16
1955	686	5	13	18	8	0	8	144	1	2	2	6	2	0	1179	12	12	19	11	0	6
1956	688	7	16	6	17	3	5	139	1	2	10	4	0	0	1187	14	11	16	7	1	7
1957	668	1	13	14	13	0	4	144	2	3	13	9	2	0	1199	5	14	29	29	0	13
1958	657	6	13	13	10	0	6	147	1	1	0	2	0	2	1190	9	15	5	27	0	6
1959	653	8	6	9	6	0	8	145	0	2	0	0	0	0	1162	6	18	18	36	0	12
1960	658	1	9	13	6	2	4	143	1	1	1	0	0	0	1132	5	10	32	30	0	8
1961	657	4	14	10	5	2	7	144	1	4	2	6	0	0	1129	15	17	25	37	3	7
1962	652	3	11	7	11	2	0	136	2	1	0	0	0	0	1115	7	15	26	35	0	6
1963	640	2	14	19	7	2	1	137	2	4	2	3	0	1	1098	7	16	16	12	0	11
1964	640	3	9	9	11	0	9	134	0	2	2	1	2	1	1093	8	12	20	12	0	4
1965	632	4	9	18	9	4	7	133	0	4	1	7	0	2	1097	12	13	19	18	0	3
1966	636	2	8	16	1	2	3	123	0	1	0	1	0	4	1097	6	15	5	14	0	5
1967	645	2	9	8	6	1	11	122	0	3	1	5	0	0	1079	4	18	24	44	0	4
1968	639	1	13	6	6	2	6	115	0	4	2	1	0	2	1045	2	15	12	3	0	4
1969	627	3	13	14	22	1	2	112	0	4	8	0	1	1	1041	6	9	11	15	0	5
1970	609	3	13	14	2	0	5	116	1	3	2	0	0	4	1035	2	16	15	6	0	9
1971	611	1	11	5	6	0	7	116	1	0	2	0	0	0	1030	3	13	20	23	2	11
1972	600	2	9	20	5	3	5	118	0	3	8	1	0	0	1017	4	9	18	2	1	7
1973	608	2	9	7	6	0	2	122	3	2	1	1	0	0	1028	3	15	30	11	0	11
1974	602	2	12	14	4	0	5	123	0	0	2	3	0	4	1035	1	10	19	8	0	8
1975	602	1	15	11	1	0	4	122	3	3	2	3	0	0	1037	5	14	17	7	0	13
1976	598	0	9	7	2	0	0	121	0	2	3	1	0	5	1038	2	6	17	19	0	11
1977	594	0	3	19	3	0	5	121	0	2	6	1	0	0	1032	5	9	6	6	0	5
1978	607	0	11	6	1	0	4	120	2	1	6	1	0	0	1028	2	15	11	17	0	11

Table 3 continued

Year	No*	Leinster Q M						Munster Q M						Ulster Q M							
		B	D	Trans. in	Trans. out	Marry in	Marry out	No.	B	D	Trans. in	Trans. out	Marry in	Marry out	No.	B	D	Trans. in	Trans. out	Marry in	Marry out
1979	601	0	4	6	3	0	2	126	0	2	6	0	0	0	1009	2	13	15	11	0	5
1980	600	0	12	6	3	0	3	130	2	2	7	4	0	1	1002	4	17	13	15	0	5
1981	591	1	6	9	3	0	7	136	0	2	3	3	0	1	987	1	13	12	3	0	11
1982	592	2	10	9	4	0	4	134	1	3	5	0	0	0	984	3	17	9	3	0	13
1983	589	0	7	8	4	0	3	137	1	1	1	0	0	0	976	6	14	7	15	0	5
1984	586	0	8	0	7	0	3	138	0	1	12	1	0	0	960	2	16	21	12	0	9
1985	571	0	9	10	3	4	4	148	0	0	5	0	0	0	955	4	9	15	7	1	4
1986	569	0	5	2	1	0	4	153	0	2	15	5	0	1	958	2	16	15	16	0	5
1987	565	1	4	9	0	0	4	161	0	0	8	1	0	1	943	8	14	11	24	0	12
1988	571	0	4	10	6	0	5	168	0	0	7	2	0	1	924	3	6	13	5	0	6
1989	570	1	6	5	7	1	5	173	0	2	13	7	0	3	929	5	14	12	6	0	8
1990	563							175							925						

Note: The notation for column heads has the following meanings:

No. is the number of Friends in each Quarterly Meeting reported in the Yearly Meeting Statistical Report.

B is the number of births reported.

D is the number of deaths reported.

Trans. in, is the number of Friends who either joined the Society, or transferred their membership to the Quarterly Meeting.

Trans. out, is the number of Friends who transferred their membership to another Quarterly Meeting.

Marry in, is the number of weddings that took place between Friends.

Marry out, is the number of weddings between a Friend and another who is not a member of the Society.

In 1910 Friends in what became the Republic outnumbered Friends in what is now Northern Ireland. As the number in the South declined, the number in the North remained virtually unchanged for almost a half century. After 1957 a decline began that was almost as steep as that seen in the Republic between 1911 and 1940. The loss continued until 1972, when there was a five year lull. Since 1977, the creation of the new meetings of Coleraine in 1980, and Bishop Street in 1985, momentarily showed the general rate of decline. Between 1957 and 1989 Ulster Friends lost almost a fifth of their memberships. Their decline is similar to that of the larger churches, including the Roman Catholics.

Each of the Quarterly Meeting's experience is different. To begin in Leinster Quarterly Meeting, the period before World War II was one of decline. After 1936, and for 20 years there was little change. However,

since 1956, with a few minor hesitations, the number of Friends in this Quarterly has declined steadily. Their numbers went from 959 in 1911 to 570 in 1989, a much smaller proportionate decline than the large non-Catholic groups. At first glance this seems to be related to the gap between births and deaths. Only in 1959 during the entire 90-year period did the number of recorded births exceed the number of deaths, see table 3 above.

Table 4
Certificates of Removal Sent and Received by Dublin
Monthly Meeting of Friends

YEARS	Removals to:				Totals
	Great Britain	Northern Ireland	26 Irish counties	Elsewhere	
'31 '40	37	4	12	0	53
'41 '50	24	10	6	6	46
'51 '60	27	5	17	5	54
'61 '70	21	6	8	2	37
'71 '80	13	0	7	7	27
'81 '89	10	1	9	2	22

	Removals received from:				Totals
	Great Britain	Northern Ireland	26 Irish counties	Elsewhere	
'48 '50	7	1	4	1	13
'51 '60	14	2	8	4	28
'61 '70	8	3	4	2	17
'71 '80	5	2	8	2	17
'81 '89	9	1	1	3	14

Net Change of Removals in and out of
Dublin Monthly Meeting

	To Dublin	From Dublin	Net Change
'51 '60	54	28	26
'61 '70	37	17	20
'71 '80	27	17	10
'81 '89	22	14	8

Note: These data were produced from the registers of removals kept by Dublin Monthly Meeting.

The number of births needs to be treated with caution as this does not represent the real rate of demographic growth. This is due to the rule that only a "... child born of parents both of whom are members has a right to membership in the Society".⁷ Hence, a child of a Friend and a non-Friend is not entered in this column. Instead, the child may be given membership at request of the parent. These children are included in the transfer column. Annual statistical reports do not distinguish between the requests made for infants and for older children.

Friends' birth-rates have followed the pattern found in most of the industrial world. During and after the two major wars birth-rates increased. The increases are responsible for the slower decline observed at these times. Increase after the First War was followed by a steep decline during the Depression. Then, after the Second War, another decline in birth-rates began in the 1960s. However, for the 90-year period, deaths have outnumbered births.

The problem of emigration, as shown by new members and membership transfers, has countered the demographic loss to a small extent. Figures provided by the annual statistical reports overstate the case. However, they show that 1050 transfers have been received, while 739 have transferred out. The pattern of loss and gain through transfers is rather uneven. Net losses were seen just before and after World War I, and in the period just after Independence. There have been other years in which net loss was noted, particularly in 1956, 1969 and 1984. In the arithmetic of loss, Leinster Friends would find their numbers sadly depleted but for additions of new Friends and transfers from other parts of the Society.

Examining the removals in Dublin Monthly Meeting, the meeting that represents 95 per cent of the Quarterly, there has been a net gain. The difference, a net increase, is now a significant part of the membership of this monthly meeting, see table 4.

Returning to table 3, Munster Quarterly Meeting's numbers declined steadily between 1910 and 1950. The war-time respite in Leinster was not reflected in Munster's numbers though their birth-rate has been consistently higher. After a minor surge in the late 1950s, the decline continued until early in the 1970s. Since then, the number of Friends in Munster has grown from its low of 116; by 1989 it stood at 168.

Munster Friends demographic arithmetic is not as dismal as Leinster's. Unlike Leinster, they have had only a small excess of deaths over births. Like Leinster, they have had more transfers in than transfers out. However, the pattern is different. The steady decline between 1910 and 1969 is directly related to the excess of transfers out. Since then, the

transfers to Munster, and their ability to attract non-Friends seeking the religious experience provided by Friends has produced growth.

Numbers in Ulster Quarterly Meeting remained close to 1150 for more than 50 years, between 1910 and 1962. By then they had started a slow decline to the 1990 figure of 925, 80 per cent of the number in 1910. One part of the decline is associated with the decline in the birth rate. It declined from nine births per thousand population, to the present figure of about three per thousand population. Ulster Quarterly Meeting's steady loss for the last 30 years, has not been shared equally. Lisburn Monthly Meeting declined from 592 members in 1952 to 332 in 1989. Lurgan had 325 in 1951 and in 1988 it had 230. In contrast, Grange and Richhill Monthly Meeting, once the smallest of the three Ulster monthly meetings, grew steadily from 231 in 1950, to 367 in 1989.

Membership numbers are the basis on which the Society of Friends survives. However, perhaps the most important factor in the life of the Society is attendance at meetings for worship. We are fortunate that Ireland Yearly meeting began the practice of publishing this kind of information in 1966. These data are estimates provided by clerks of meetings of the average numbers who attended meeting for worship during the year. The estimates are made in different ways. Some clerks reported to me that they carefully counted the number present each First Day, and then provided an average. Other clerks confessed the numbers were "best" guesses rather than averages. As the clerk changes from time to time, the figures are more volatile than the membership numbers in the annual statistical reports. These data have been presented in five-year intervals to reduce the volatility and to show the trends, see table 5.

Attendance at particular meetings for worship in Leinster has reflected their loss of numbers. In 1966 an average of 221 people attended meetings for worship, in 1989 the number was 168. Two meetings had minor increases, and some retained their members while the others declined. In Munster the average attendance at meetings for worship was 52 in 1966. Attendance grew to 121 in 1974. Since then, it has dipped under 90. The number now stands at its highest point of 137. Individually, three of the four meetings in the Quarterly have shared in the growth. Cork has doubled, Waterford has almost doubled. Limerick has grown to almost four times the size it was in 1966. Growth in Cork and Limerick has taken place in the last ten years.

In 1966, attendance at particular meetings for worship in Ulster Quarterly Meeting was 391. Since then, attendance has grown and fallen slowly. In 1968 the number stood at 417, and in 1970 it was 400. There were some rapid changes recorded for three meetings: Frederick

St., Belfast South, and Brookfield. Their growth and decline account for the Quarterly Meeting's volatility. There was a decline from the early figures to a low of 321 in 1979. Then numbers grew to 360 in 1989. Recent increases are associated with the creation of Coleraine and Bishop Street meetings. Moyallon and Tamnamore grew slightly during the period. All the other meetings have fewer people attending meeting for worship now than they did in 1966, see table 5.

Table 5
Attendance at Particular Meetings for Worship
1966 and in 5 Year Intervals 1969 to 1989

	1966	1969	1974	1979	1984	1989
Leinster QM						
Dublin MM						
Dublin (Thursday)	11	12	6	6	5	7
Dublin	50	38	40	34	27	25
Monkstown	40	35	48	43	38	43
Churchtown	73	58	55	56	58	49
Rathfarnham	27	29	28	24	16	12
Edenderry	5	11	2	5	9	13
Co. Wexford MM						
Ballitore & Enniscorthy	15	14	8	6	9	9
Leinster QM totals	221	197	187	174	162	158
Munster QM						
Cork MM						
Cork	12	9	8	19	30	27
West Cork W. G.						12
Waterford MM						
Waterford	25	28	40	42	28	42
boarders in term	–	30	45	24	13	25
Tramore	8	7	11	5	6	6
Limerick	7	7	8	8	9	25
Munster QM totals	52	81	112	98	86	137
Republic Totals	273	278	299	272	248	295

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Table 5 continued.

	1966	1969	1974	1979	1984	1989
Ulster QM						
Lisburn MM						
Belfast Frederick St.	41	57	45	34	25	33
Belfast South	48	70	40	37	45	46
Bishop Street						12
Coleraine					13	10
Lisburn	45	60	40	42	37	35
Brookfield	15	24	14	8	7	7
Bangor	11	15	10	12	11	12
Lurgan MM						
Lurgan	50	40	55	40	36	35
Moyallon	8	14	11	5	22	13
Bessbrook	15	15	12	9	14	15
Portadown	31	38	27	23	35	32
Grange and Richhill MM						
Grange	60	65	55	50	45	45
Richhill	55	55	45	46	45	51
Tamnamore	12	15	12	15	12	14
Ulster QM totals	391	468	366	321	347	360
Yearly Meeting totals	664	746	665	593	595	655

Note: The data on this table were extracted from the material published with the Yearly Meeting Minutes.

IV

Explaining the Changes

Change in meeting membership is related to general social change. Industrial growth and decline affect the number of people available. Hence, growth in industrial towns and suburban fringes is related to growth in some meetings. New people usually choose to live in the suburbs. They will look for places of worship near where they live. Distance to the centre of town will serve to discourage them from active membership in the older meetings. There is also a tendency for people who live in the central part of towns to move to the suburbs. The two factors combine to reduce membership in the older meetings and increase the cost to those who remain in membership.

Inter-marriage, in Ireland, is a term fraught with emotion. It usually refers to marriage between Protestants and Roman Catholics. What has excited Friends about it in the past is the fear of loss of young people to the Society of Friends through inter-marriage to Roman Catholics. The term is not normally used when a marriage is celebrated between members of different Protestant groups.⁸ The demand by the Catholic Church that the children of these marriages be brought up as Catholics is thought to have led to a loss of members. The Catholic Church changed its policy when they published a new decree *motu proprio* "Matrimonia Mixta" in 1971. Since then, the loss of Friends who married Catholics has equalled the gain of former Catholics who chose to join the Society.

However, the sense of loss remains. In 1941 the annual marriage rate for Friends was almost double what it is today. Although the War affected marriage rates, it was a temporary effect. Also, the proportion of marriages to non-Friends has increased. A lower marriage rate, and a higher proportion of marriages to non-Friends, have combined. Now, the rate of marriage between Friends is about one seventh of what it was half a century ago. Unfortunately, the annual statistical report does not identify the religious denomination of the non-Friends in these marriages.

In an attempt to discover whether there has been an increase in the frequency of marriages between Friends and Roman Catholics, I examined the records kept on marriages "not according to rule". These are the marriages of members of Ireland Yearly Meeting that take place outside a Friends meeting, or outside of Ireland. The reports of these are sent to the Yearly Meeting office where they are recorded. The records provide the place where the wedding was celebrated, and the religion of the other partner. Using these records, I constructed table 6, below. Although it will not give a complete picture of the religions of the people who chose to marry Friends, it does indicate the direction of change.

First, table 6 confirms the general observation about the decline in rates of marriage. Second, the proportion of marriages between Friends or between a Friend and an Attender, even outside of Ireland has declined. Third, there has been a general decline in the frequency of marriage between Friends and members of all the other religious groups, except Roman Catholics. In contrast, the frequency of marriage with Roman Catholics has almost doubled in the period examined. In the most recent decade, the proportion of marriages to Roman Catholics has become a major part of the total. It is the combination of the general decline in marriage rate, and the increase in the proportion who have

married Roman Catholics that has caused Friends concern. That a Friend is as likely to become a Roman Catholic, as a Catholic is to become a Friend does not reduce the level of concern.

Table 6
Marriages in Ireland "NOT ACCORDING TO RULE"
1941 TO 1989

DECADES	BETWEEN FRIENDS AND						Total
	Friends or Att.	Presbyt.	Angl.	Other Prots.	Roman Caths.	Other Relns.	
1941-50	4	47	86	17	6	4	164
1951-60	3	31	62	15	5	1	117
1961-70	3	29	38	13	12	0	95
1971-80	1	20	25	16	10	9	81
1981-89	1	10	10	5	10	2	38
IYM Total	12	137	221	66	43	16	495

Note: The data are from the registry of "marriages not according to rule" kept in the Yearly Meeting Office at Swanbrook House in Dublin. The notation for Friends or Attenders in this table is for marriages that took place outside a Friends meeting, or outside of Ireland.

Reasons for the decline in Friends weddings are complex. Friends low birth rate has made it more difficult for a young Friend to find a suitable marriage partner who is also a Friend. Many Irish young Friends are related to each other. Many who are not related have known each other since early childhood. Romantic attachments between them are, therefore, less likely. Hence, young people who remain in Ireland either stay single, or if they marry they are more likely to choose non-Friends. It should be expected that most of the recent marriages between Friends and Roman Catholics have been celebrated in the Republic.

Two other variables have an effect on growth in the Yearly Meeting. They are related to the task of providing for a place of worship and a way to meet Friends' concerns. Buildings, burial grounds and committees are important. Also they are expensive in resources and Friends' time. When the Yearly Meeting was much larger, Friends built to meet the needs of those people. Now that the numbers are much smaller, many of the buildings are both old and too big. In several places there are too many of them for Friends' immediate needs.

The Yearly Meeting corporate structure has the same kind of problem. It is composed of levels of meetings, each with its own

complex set of committees. At Yearly Meeting in 1989, for instance, reports were received from 15 committees and people. At Yearly Meeting's committee in 1990, 12 more committees were mentioned that were not minuted at Yearly Meeting, to bring the total to twenty-seven. One of the committees, the Law Committee, was so obscure that many Friends had never heard of it. Quarterly meetings, monthly meetings and preparative meetings each have their own committees. The duties of the quarterly meeting are listed on one page of the Discipline. Those of the monthly meeting occupy nine pages. Not very much is written in the Discipline about the preparative meeting. However, some preparative meetings have several committees, and at least one building, of their own to care for.

Nominating committees have to struggle to find people for all the committees listed. Over time, the same names appear repeatedly on lists of committee members: a few dedicated souls are carrying a load once designed for a much larger group of people. The Discipline specifies the nature and content of the committee structure. From my observation, the committees in some Quarterly Meetings are not as elaborated as they are in others. In them a few Friends carry most of the responsibility.

Once a committee structure is established, people become dependent on it and are reluctant to reduce it. A reduced membership will remain wedded to a committee structure geared to the historically larger number. At first, the members may be quite willing to take on additional responsibilities, but, after a time, the load becomes more than they want to carry indefinitely. So, the personal cost of maintaining the human system is added to the cost of the architectural structures: the two demands combine with the other forces to drive away old members and to discourage the participation of new people.

V

Conclusion

The number of Friends in Ireland is declining. There is a sense of ageing as well. Emigration on school leaving drives the change. It shows up in the small size of the gatherings of young Friends, infrequent weddings between Friends, and the low birth-rates.⁹ In the gloom of the decline are some bright lights. A few meetings have been growing. The meetings in growing industrial towns have attracted people who have not been brought up as Friends. Growth has also come when Friends go out of their way to meet the spiritual needs of new members. This combination is to be found in all the meetings that have shown signs of growth.

Growth is found in several places. In Ulster Quarterly Meeting two new meetings have been formed: Coleraine and Bishop Street. They grew, in part, as a result of the growth in the University of Ulster, and the peace work in that part of Northern Ireland. Neither of them has a meeting house. Growth is also found in the older meetings of Moyallon and Tamnamore; both are in towns with new housing estates. However, attendance at meeting for worship in each of the northern monthly meetings was lower in 1989 than it had been in 1966.

Three meetings in Munster Quarter are growing. None of them has an old meeting house. Waterford built a new one less than 20 years ago. Limerick sold their meeting house and now rents space in it. Cork also sold its large meeting house, and now uses the small one by their burial ground. The West Cork Worship Group was formed recently and is showing signs of growth. Leinster Quarterly Meeting, in contrast, has been slowly shrinking. This is in spite of the growth in the population of Dublin. Friends in Dublin have a collection of valuable buildings and burial grounds. Although not all the meeting houses are old, none of them is in new suburbs. A sign of promise that has not affected the figures is the formation of worship groups in Drogheda, Bray and at Swanbrook. Growth in these places, if sustained, may herald a new period of growth for Leinster Friends.

The average attendance at meetings for worship – members, attenders and visitors – in the Republic during any one week in 1989 was about 295. In Northern Ireland the number was 360. These are enough to fill a good sized meeting in each part of Ireland. Yet these Friends are expected to provide energetic work for their committees, and keep their buildings in good repair. An obvious part of growth and decline is related to these factors, growing meetings that have either no meeting house, or a modest one. Meetings with an “Old Quaker Monument” find that growth eludes them. Growth is more likely when the burden of buildings and committee structures are in balance with the number of Friends involved. The message is the old one of simplicity. Here it is one of buildings and committees.

David E.W. Holden
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NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ This is a modified version of the report given to Ireland Yearly Meeting held in Dublin in 1990. My thanks go to: the people who work in the Library at Swanbrook House, Dublin, particularly Verity E. Murdoch, and Elizabeth (Betty) O. Pearson,

for their help and encouragement; Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, and the Department of Sociology, University of Dublin for the support given me during my sabbatical in Ireland; and, Woodbrooke College for the place to write the preliminary version of this report.

² The matter was brought to the attention of Ireland Yearly Meeting in 1940. Then, in 1989, Christopher Moriarty reanalyzed some of the membership data and reported his results to the Yearly Meeting.

³ The number of Anglicans and Presbyterians has been declining since the census of 1861, see R. P. McDermott and D. A. Webb, *Irish Protestantism, Today and Tomorrow: A Demographic Study*, Dublin and Belfast: Association for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1937, Table 1.

The studies done by Howard W. Robinson on the population of the Diocese of Ardfert in 1971, and on the Diocese of Ferns, in 1973 both Church of Ireland serve to confirm McDermott and Webb's description of population loss.

⁴ McDermott and Webb's figures for the late nineteenth century in the six counties of Northern Ireland are not as clear. The Anglican figures grew between 1861 and 1871, then declined to 1891, after which they showed growth to 1926. The Presbyterians, on the other hand, declined steadily from 1861 to 1891, after which there was little change for several decades.

⁵ See: W. E. Vaughn and A. J. F. Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish Historical Statistics*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978.

⁶ Thomas Keane, 'Demographic Trends', in Michael Hurley, SJ, (ed.), *Irish Anglicanism 1869-1969. Essays on the Role of Anglicanism in Irish Life Presented to the Church of Ireland on the Occasion of the Centenary of its Disestablishment by a group of Methodists, Presbyterian, Quaker and Roman Catholic Scholars*, Dublin, Allen Figgis Limited, 1970, p. 175.

⁷ See: *Christian Discipline of the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland*, Dublin, Ireland Yearly Meeting, 1971, p. 16, Ch. 3, para. 5.

⁸ All of the Irish minority groups in the Republic appear to be concerned with this problem. Jack White wrote in 1975:

The threat to survival is very real ... as many as three out of every ten Protestant grooms and two out of every ten Protestant brides married Catholics. These figures are probably higher year by year; and mixed marriage in this generation must mean - if the rule of the Church is obeyed - an all Catholic family in the next ... (Jack White, *Minority Report; The Protestant Community in the Irish Republic*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1975, p. 130). The House of Bishops of the Church of Ireland discussed the matter in 1951, 1971, and again in 1980 where they minuted: '... the Inter-Church Joint Standing Committee on Mixed Marriages [is] ... greatly concerned with the inherent injustice towards members of the Church of Ireland of many applications of the Roman Catholic *motu proprio* "Matrimonia Mixta" decree ... The present regulations are socially and politically divisive ...'

Similar concerns have been voiced in all the other Protestant Churches in Ireland.

⁹ Friends are not alone in having fewer children. This is a trend that has affected the whole Irish population, see: Brendan M. Walsh, 'Marriage in Ireland in the Twentieth Century', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *Marriage in Ireland*, Dublin, College Press, 1985. He found that although the marriage rate per generation has risen, the '... Trend in the fertility of marriage over the period 1961-1981 [fell] ... Since 1980 there has been a pronounced fall in the number of births recorded ...' (p. 140).